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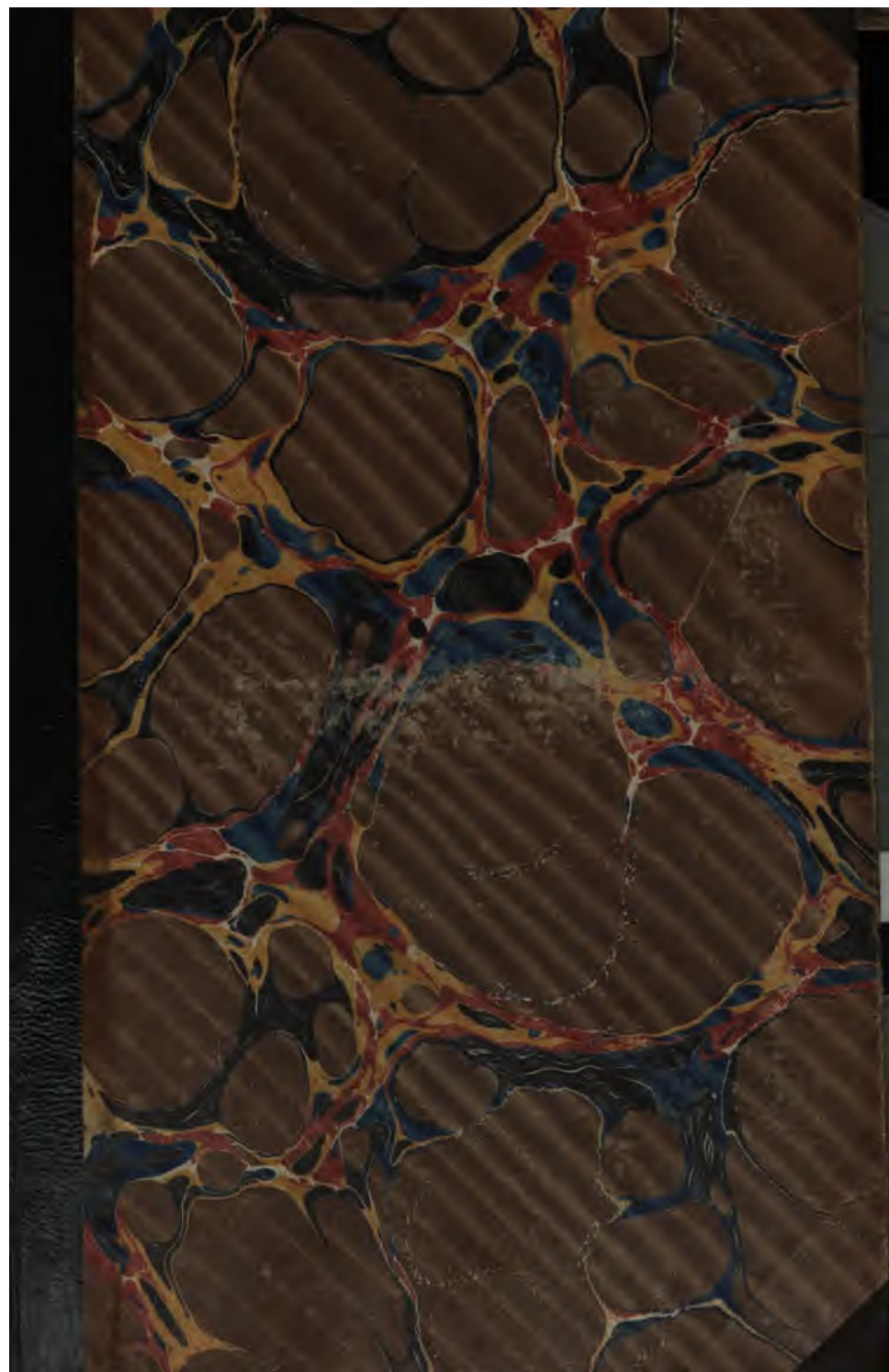
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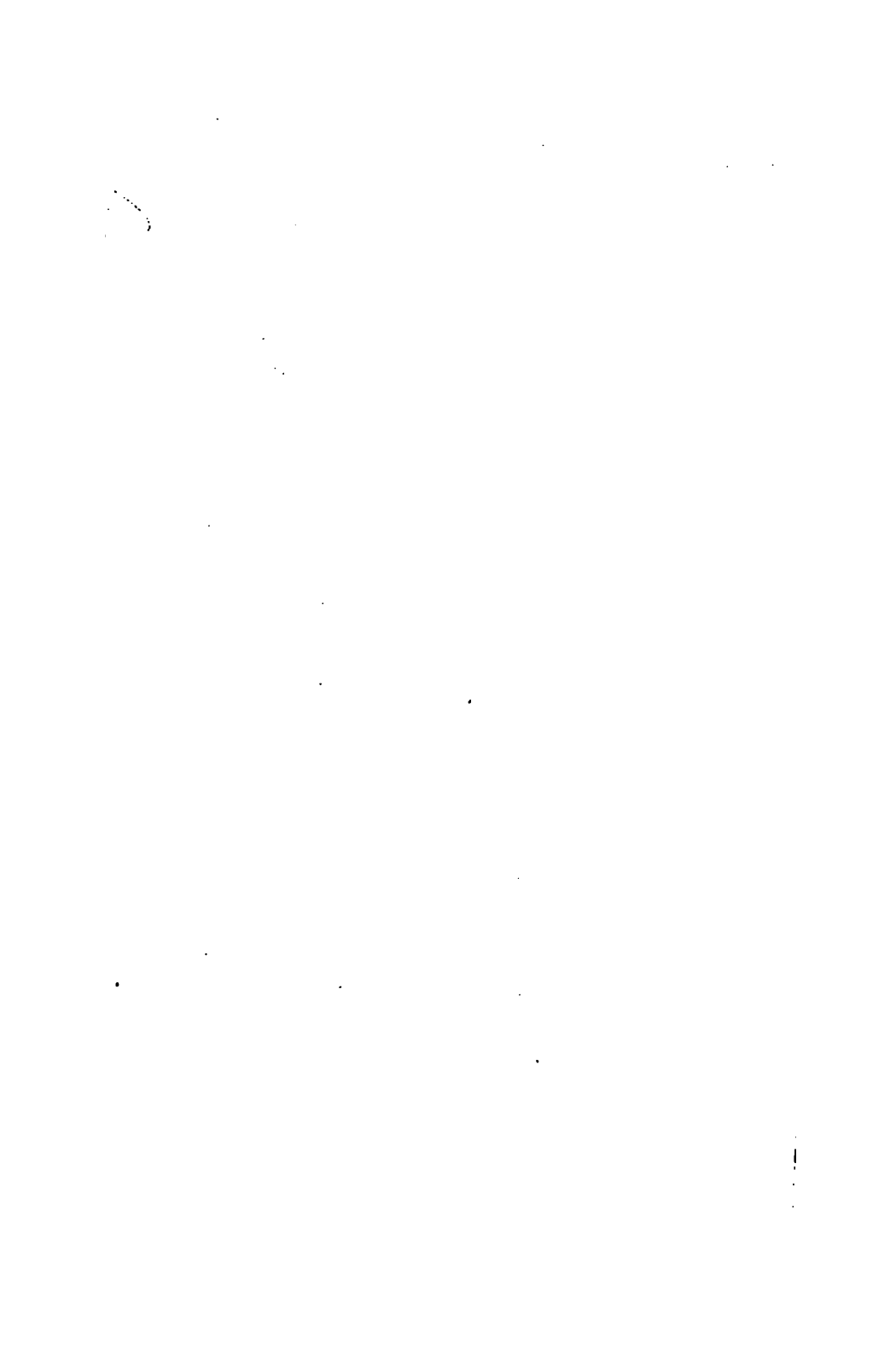
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# RUTH EARNLEY :

A Tale.

BY

MRS. MACKENZIE DANIELS,

AUTHOR OF "MY SISTER MINNIE," "FERNLEY MANOR,"

"THE STUDENT'S WIFE," "GERTRUDE CAMERON."

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## RUTH EARNLEY.

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### CHAPTER I.

IT was with feelings scarcely less painful than those with which I had anticipated Bessie Graham's departure, that I saw the month Miss Sinclair had allotted as the period of her stay with us, drawing to a close. It had been to me the happiest month I had spent for many, many years, and although I neither possessed at present the full assurance of faith, nor yet that fervent love to Christ which causes His people to take pleasure in every sacrifice they may be called upon to make on His account, still I could through Him approach the Father with some degree of childlike confidence, and

say, "Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief."

Miss Sinclair was so uniformly gentle and friendly, if not absolutely affectionate to me now, that I had for some time had it on my mind to ask her whence arose the exceeding coldness and apparent dislike she had manifested towards me on our first acquaintance.

At length an opportunity occurred, and I put the question with some degree of timidity, and with all the sincere respect that Miss Sinclair had so deservedly won from me.

"Will you tell me frankly," she said, "why you have asked this, if indeed you have any other motive than curiosity?"

Aunt Katherine's plainness of speech had long ceased to surprise or offend me, so I replied without hesitation, "I will not affirm that curiosity has nothing to do with the matter, but I think there are better motives mingling with it. I have an idea that I may learn something useful by your explanation, since I feel assured that your conduct towards me was not the result of

merely personal antipathy, which even had you felt, you would have endeavoured not to show."

"Why might it not have arisen from the entire want of sympathy that must ever exist between those who are serving God and those who are in bondage to the world?"

"Because, in the first place, the Scriptures give Christians no warrant for behaving with coldness and severity towards those who are 'without;' and because, in the second place, your conduct towards Edward is so very different from what it was (at the time to which I am alluding) to me."

"Yes, you have thus far considered the matter justly. It would ill become one whom the grace of God has enlightened to manifest a cold, unfriendly spirit towards any who are still in darkness. Very different was the conduct of our gracious Master, in whose footsteps we seek and profess to follow. But how did he behave with those who while making an outward profession of religion, and speaking great things of their own

righteousness, proved by their conformity to a sinful world, by their covetousness and other unholy practices, that the spirit of Christ had never had any place in their hearts,—that they were, in fact, but as whited sepulchres which appear beautiful without, but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

"But I was not making any particular profession of religion at the time of our first acquaintance."

"You *had* been doing so, if I was rightly informed, and as your own confessions to me not long ago likewise testified. Perhaps I should tell you that I knew much of your former history when I came to see you as a bride, and that the conduct which appeared so strange to you was determined on before we met."

"You regarded me then as a mere professor, who had never known the grace of God, and who was consequently not entitled to be received as a friend and a sister by one of His children?"

“I do not say that I did; I only wish you to understand that, as far as I knew, it might have been so, and that on this assumption I was justified in treating you with the coldness and reserve that I should not think of manifesting to one who made no profession of religion. But it might also have been that you *were* a child of God; a disobedient child, walking disorderly, sinning against the light you had received, and bringing disgrace upon the holy name of Christian, by which you had been called. My first interview with you inclined me rather to this latter opinion, and I could not therefore do otherwise than treat you in the manner I did.”

“Yet does not the Apostle say, ‘Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted.’”

“Yes, but that supposes a sudden temptation yielded to, but repented of, not a continuance in the path of error. Now had you been really an enlightened child of God, your

union with an unbeliever, your conformity to the world, your constant mingling in unchristian society, would have been quite enough to place you amongst those disorderly walkers, from whom the Apostle commanded all godly Christians to withdraw themselves—that is, to avoid treating them with the affection and familiarity that they would evince towards the obedient brethren.”

“I see now fully the grounds on which you acted, and of course you were justified in all your conduct; but may I still venture to say that I think, in most cases, a person so situated would be more likely to be led back by gentleness and persuasion, than by a treatment the reverse of this.”

“We have no right to suppose that we know better than God; and although there are cases in which we are told even while ‘having no company’ with an erring believer, to ‘admonish him as a brother,’ yours did not appear to me a case of this kind. I could not undo what you had done; I could not persuade you to be disobedient to your

husband; and besides this, I was by no means sure that you had ever been anything but an empty professor after all."

"Yet I am sure you might, even at that time, have obtained a considerable influence over me."

"Not if I had flattered and caressed you as your other friends had done. I had heard enough to be convinced that you had been treated far too tenderly, and I knew that if I was to be made the instrument of doing you any good, it must be by means wholly different from those which had hitherto been employed so fruitlessly for your benefit."

"Then you did desire to do me good, even then?"

"Most earnestly; and be very sure I did not forget to serve you in the best way that at that time was open to me—nay, in the best way that at any time we can serve each other—at the mercy seat of Christ."

From the period of this conversation my affection for dear aunt Katherine grew rapidly, and though she was never in the least de-



monstrative herself, she treated me with a gentle kindness and familiarity that amply repaid the love I bestowed on her. Nevertheless the faithful monitor had not passed from the scene, and while our guest remained with us there was little fear of my forgetting the many frailties that still clung to me, or of sinking into slothfulness concerning the things that belonged to my peace.

"What I fear for you most," said Miss Sinclair, just before she bade me good bye, "is the sin of idolatry, than which none is more utterly displeasing to the Lord. You cling too entirely, too absorbingly to your children, particularly to Willie, and I am afraid if this continues that you will need a sharper rod than any that has yet been lifted against you."

"What *can* I do? I must love them, and love is always a passion with me."

"Yes, you must and you ought to love them, but you need not make idols of them. Inordinate affection is among the fruits of the flesh, and should have no part in our

spiritual nature. I speak with the intention only of warning you, that you may look well to yourself, and endeavour to escape the human sufferings that a persistence in the sin of idolatry will entail upon you. I know that if you are God's child he will take care to get your heart by some means or other into his own possession."

"I fear I shall be often stumbling when you are no longer beside me."

"If you depend in the slightest degree on *my* arm to hold you up, it is indeed high time that I was away. Let us not insult our Divine Master by assuming that there is not in Him a sufficiency for every possible spiritual want of his disciples. Christian fellowship and Christian society are good, but a dependence on Christ alone is infinitely better."

"You will pray for me that I may soon learn to feel this, for it is too true that at present I am very far from such a spiritual state of mind."

"You must expect much both from within

and from without to contend against, for remember always that the position in which you so unwisely placed yourself is in no way altered, and that you are likely to feel its inevitable evils even more when you are walking with God than you did while in a state of alienation from Him."

"Oh, if Edward could be brought to the truth!"

"This must be the subject of your constant earnest prayer, and of your most diligent and affectionate efforts when he is with you; but should you after all make no impression, should your husband remain as careless and worldly as ever, do not let your heart on this account become estranged from him, remembering always that God alone can give light to the darkened soul, and that you married Edward *knowing him to be an unbeliever.*"

"How true it is that one false step in life involves us in a net from which there is no possibility of extricating ourselves."

"And how comforting to the believer to know that even his false steps, even his sins

and ignorances, shall all eventually work together for his good, however rough and thorny may be the road over which they will lead him."

"Yes, but are we not more apt to look down in despair at this rough and thorny road which our foolishness has obliged us to travel, than up to the 'glorious land of rest, where we shall at length learn how necessary this journey has been for us?"

"If we do so, it is our own fault: God does not require us to be for ever dwelling on our past sins, or mourning over their inevitable consequences. He puts us upon a rough road, not because he has any pleasure in punishing his people, but because we require discipline. The stars of heaven are however all shining brightly above our heads, and what shall hinder us from gazing up at them, and forgetting in their surpassing beauty the unpleasantness of the rugged road beneath our feet."

"But even if we could do this, would it be right to lose altogether the remembrance

of those sins for which God is intending to chastise us?"

"Never fear. What God means to do, He *will* do. Whenever His wisdom sees it to be necessary He will cause our feet to stumble upon some sharp stone which will effectually remind us of our past foolishness. But I think we may in all confidence leave the discipline to Him, and not fear to look up at the stars at those times when we are walking on without any particular let or hindrance."

"How often I wish I could obey implicitly that injunction of the Apostle, which says, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything with prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God.' This would be a high attainment of Christian faith, would it not?"

"Not so high but what the humblest disciple may aspire to it. The Apostle addressed the whole body of his converts, some of whom must have been but 'babes in Christ,' and he certainly would not have

enjoined as a general duty that which the very weakest amongst them would have been incapable of performing."

"When you tell me a thing, I am perfectly convinced of its truth; but somehow I cannot as regards myself, succeed in realizing it."

"No, because you differ in some extraordinary and mysterious manner from all the human race—you have nothing in common with your fellow sinners—you require another revelation, another gospel written expressly for yourself. Is it not so?"

"Oh, Miss Sinclair ——"

"Nay, this is what your constant repudiation of the gospel promises, and the gospel comforts, implies. There is indeed no more rational way of settling the question."

I really don't know what there was about Miss Sinclair so different to every other person I have ever met; but certain it is that whether she spoke with the stern gravity which I *have* heard her assume, or with the simple earnest persuasion that was

perhaps the most natural to her, or with the quiet, good tempered irony that dictated the words I have just recorded, she never failed to produce an effect verging towards the one she aimed at, and to leave an impression on the mind concerning her own singular powers of persuasion, that was altogether remarkable.

I owe much, very much to her whom I had so long despaired of gaining for a friend, and the strongest words I can use are inadequate to convey a just idea of the many and varied excellencies combined in that one character.

The children, like myself, were quite inconsolable at the thoughts of aunt Katherine's departure. She had been so unwearied in her attentions to them, so sympathizing in all their childish pleasures, so patient in listening to all their childish griefs, so tenderly indulgent to all their acknowledged faults and weaknesses, and yet at the same time so firm and steadfast in pointing them to the truth, that her influence over them both was unbounded, and I am sure that

Willie loved and looked up to dear aunt Katherine with a devotion only second to that which he felt for me.

He never forgot his first idea about her being like a grown up angel, and the more I saw of Miss Sinclair the more I was able to understand this childish thought, for there was something about aunt Katherine's face when she was in a silent mood that was exceedingly pure and saint-like, that often reminded me irresistibly of our Lord's words, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

At length the dreaded parting came, and I was only prevented from giving way to violent grief by the calm, unruffled manner of aunt Katherine herself, and by the tone of mild rebuke in which she quoted the first verse of a hymn that was a favourite with both of us.

"How can we mourn the loss of friends  
While Jesus still is near—  
How dare the saints His love has bless'd  
Shed one repining tear?"




"I will try to be good," I said chokingly, "but you must allow a little for natural feeling—I am still very, very weak."

"Never tell me that again," she replied gravely, "I don't like to hear Christians talk of their weakness. It either proceeds from a false humility or from a misapprehension of what they can and what they have to do. 'Go forward,' is God's command to His people. Moses knew nothing of the power given unto him while he stood still on the shores of the Red Sea, but when he obeyed the command to go forward, the mighty waves divided in the midst, and he and all his company passed through on dry land."

The children hastily wiped their tearful eyes, and came up with quiet though very pale faces for aunt Katherine's farewell kiss.

"Now mind," she said, "that you both set a good example to mama, and only remember aunt Katherine to profit by the lessons she has tried to teach you. Willie and Mary have had few trials yet to endure, and therefore their minds ought to be strong



and cheerful. Mama has known sorrow and care, and it is the part of her little children to cheer and enliven her when other friends are absent. If I am spared, I hope to come again to Ashvale one of these days, and to find Willie and Mary growing in strength and knowledge—above all, in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now good bye, my children—let me hear of no sorrow and no tears on my account, and if God permit I shall soon send you a friend whom you will speedily learn to love as much as you have loved aunt Katherine.”

Her last words to me as she kissed my cheek were—

“Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart—wait, I say, on the Lord.”

## CHAPTER II.

FOR many days after the departure of aunt Katherine I felt her loss too acutely to be able to estimate the amount of good her visit had done me, but as my eye grew accustomed to the vacant place, and my children's voices sounded once more merrily in the old orchard, and the remembrance of our friend's parting injunctions began to work upon my heart, I looked up and around me in astonishment and delight, scarcely daring to believe that the heavy clouds of years had really been dispersed, and that the sun was shining steadily, if not brightly, over my little world.

Not brightly do I say! oh yes, it *was* brightly, radiantly, joyously, while my precious ones, my dear, dear children were

and cheerful. Mama has known sorrow and care, and it is the part of her little children to cheer and enliven her when other friends are absent. If I am spared, I hope to come again to Ashvale one of these days, and to find Willie and Mary growing in strength and knowledge—above all, in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now good bye, my children—let me hear of no sorrow and no tears on my account, and if God permit I shall soon send you a friend whom you will speedily learn to love as much as you have loved aunt Katherine.”

Her last words to me as she kissed my cheek were—

“Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart—wait, I say, on the Lord.”



all its yet untried and barren paths, before me.

I heard frequently from Miss Sinclair, and her letters were always a source of pleasure both to me and to the children, as there were sure to be a few words addressed exclusively to them, which was enough to excite and gladden those pure and innocent little hearts for the whole day.

And one day there came a letter containing news that filled us all with delight. Fanny Cleve had been released from her engagement, and, after spending a week with Miss Sinclair, she would at once proceed to Ashvale and undertake her charge.

Up to this moment I had persuaded myself that something would certainly occur to prevent the accomplishment of aunt Katherine's plan regarding Fanny's residence with me. It was so exactly what I should have chosen, had a choice been given me, that, long used to disappointments of various kinds, I found it difficult to believe in the reality of the scheme proposed.

But the present letter satisfied or rather removed all my doubts, and assisted by the happy children (who thought having a governess must be—next to having a grand-mama or an aunt Katherine—the most delightful thing in the world) I commenced, with a really joyous heart, the preparations for my friend's arrival.

The following week passed swiftly away, we had all something to prepare for Fanny, and I can answer for my own hands never having worked so busily at toilet coverings and bed draperies before, and for Willie's and Mary's brains never having toiled so perseveringly at history and geography on any previous occasion.

I had told them that they were to begin their education in good earnest now, and the precious darlings were resolved that their dear new governess should neither have much trouble with them herself, nor find fault with "poor mama's teaching."

How proud I was of them! how very, very lovely and engaging they appeared to

me, and with what eagerness I anticipated the moment when I should present them to her who was henceforth to share with me the delightful task of training my beloved ones both for this world and the next.

"To-day, mama, to-day !" said two little joyous voices in my ear one bright autumn morning, as I slowly unclosed my eyes after a rather restless night, and discovered the children standing by my bed side, "have you forgotten about to-day?"

"No, my darlings," I replied, drawing them to me for the first sweet morning kiss; "I know that our friend is to arrive this evening, and as soon as I am dressed we will all go into the garden and see what flowers we can find to decorate her room."

"Oh yes, yes, how nice that will be; and, mama, may I gather those golden pippins to-day that are left on my own tree? They are really getting too ripe, and Miss Cleve will like some apples I am sure after her journey."

"I daresay she will like some off your

tree, my Willie, and you may gather them as soon after breakfast as you please."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, dear mama, and may Mary see if her pears are ripe?"

"Yes, we must get everything as nice as we possibly can, but run away now, my cherubs, for it is quite time that mama was dressed and down stairs."

We had a very busy, happy day, and the evening, a sweet autumn evening it was, found us almost tired out, but full of eager expectation and delightful excitement concerning the arrival of her in whose behalf we had so willingly and cheerfully laboured.

Mary, who was stronger and healthier than her brother, had been down at least twenty times in the course of the afternoon to the end of the green lane that led from our house to the main road, and the moment her tea was over she began her voyages of observation again, while my Willie (exhausted with his apple and flower gathering) sat patiently at my side in the parlour, asking a hundred questions about everything that



came into his little thoughtful head, and receiving my replies with all the gravity of a philosopher of eighty.

My own reflections were leading me far back to the time when I had first met Fanny Cleve at Miss Sinclair's house, and to the many confused and gloomy pictures connected with that period of my married life. Willie's questions often broke this chain of thought in rather an odd manner.

"Dear mama, while you sit and look so grave, where do all your nice thoughts, I mean those thoughts that make you smile and become pretty, go to?"

"I am afraid I am not sufficiently learned to answer you, Willie. I suppose they don't go anywhere in particular, only remain quietly folded up in the brain, against the time when circumstances shall once more call them forth."

"Oh—then has everybody, do you think, got a parcel of nice happy thoughts folded away in their brains, mama?"

"Not everybody, Willie, but all who are

true Christians and love Jesus Christ in sincerity, *ought* to have."

"I fancy aunt Katherine had—don't you, mama? though perhaps she didn't unfold them quite so often as some people."

"I am quite sure she has an abundance of nice and pleasant thoughts, Willie. Now let mama finish out her grave ones, please, darling."

For a few minutes the little voice was hushed, then as if forgetting my request, in his instinctive passion for knowledge, came the second question.

"Mama, I heard Mrs. Graham say to you to-day that the little buds would soon be expanding into blossoms—I think expanding was the word—and that then you must expect them to be looking up at the sun and skies and depending no longer on the parent stem for the supply of all their need—what did Mrs. Graham mean, mama?"

"She meant, my Willie, that by and bye you and your sister would grow into a young man and woman, and that then you would

have other objects to interest your hearts and to promote your happiness besides your 'poor mama.' It was a warning to me not to expect to keep you always to myself."

The little face put on its gravest and most thoughtful expression as the pretty lips gave utterance to the idea my words had suggested.

"Mama, I don't think you would be at all happy if Mary and I were away from you."

It was one of those simple and apparently trivial speeches that occasionally afforded me a momentary glimpse into the unfathomable depths of my love for my precious children. On all such occasions I became frightened, absolutely frightened at the intensity of the passion that was revealed to me, and not unfrequently the words, which had once possessed such power to alarm my awakened conscience, would recur, with somewhat of their old force, to my mind:—"Whoso loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me!"

"You are looking now, mama, as if all

your nice thoughts were gone for ever—don't look like that, please."

"Then you must not speak of my losing either you or your sister, Willie. There are some things, my darling, that even in imagination I am not strong enough to bear."

"Poor mama, my own darling mama, I will never leave you; indeed, indeed, I never will."

The dear head with its clustering sunny locks was hidden in my bosom, and I could feel the little warm impassioned heart beating fast against my own.

Aunt Katherine would surely have condemned such demonstration as this, and I was convinced myself that it could not but be unwise to foster in my boy an excess of tenderness which might one day prove an occasion of sufferings whose end it was not easy to foresee.

"Run out and find Mary, my pet," I said, as I gently unclasped the little arms that had been twined about my neck; "it is time she came in and rested herself."

He obeyed instantly, but the shadow, which from his very babyhood had been wont at times to dwell upon the sweet, fair face, had come to it now, and when both the children returned together, Mary was coaxing her brother to smile by putting into his mouth a fine ripe blackberry she had found in the lane.

"No signs of our friend yet, Mary dear?" I asked, with a view of changing the current of Willie's thoughts, and giving them something cheerful to rest upon.

"I don't believe she will come at all, mama—just see how late it is."

"Yes, near your bed time, is it not? Nurse came in a minute ago to ask if you were ready for her."

"Oh, let us stay up till Miss Cleve comes—do, do, mama. I must see her eat one of my beautiful pears—indeed I must."

"But Willie looks tired—he will be glad to be in bed—won't you, my little white-faced boy?"

"No, mama, I am not tired. I should

like to sit up if you would tell us some of your pretty hymns—there is one I want you so much to say to-night.”

“What is it, love?”

“That one beginning, ‘Why should I fear the darkest hour?’”

“Oh yes, yes,” added Mary eagerly, “we both like that so much, and then ‘the better lands,’ please, dear mama. It will be such a nice way of passing the time till Miss Cleve comes.”

So I placed them on either side of me, as I had often done before, and with a tiny hand of each locked in my own, I repeated one by one all the sweet hymns they loved, and spoke to them of Jesus and of heaven till the shadows of evening were closing fast around us, and their little eyes were growing heavier than they chose to acknowledge, because sleepy or not, they had resolved to see their governess before they went to bed.

At length our long patience was rewarded by the distinct sound of carriage wheels, and with a mutual clapping of hands the

children sprang from their places and could scarcely be restrained from rushing out into the garden, cold and dark as it had now become, to get an earlier peep at the weary traveller, whose excitement they of course measured by their own.

Poor Fanny, how changed I thought her when my eyes first fell upon the thin, sober face of her I had known as a young and singularly light-hearted girl. I could not for a moment or two believe that it was the same person, and it was not till after greeting me in agitated silence, she caught up the children in her arms and sobbed out as she kissed them again and again, "you blessed, blessed lambs!" that I recognized the strange, enthusiastic, attractive girl, in whom nine years ago I had felt so powerful an interest.

"Fanny, dear Fanny, I had prepared all sorts of pretty, loving words in which to welcome you to your new home, but they appear weak and powerless now to express the happiness I feel in having you with me. You do not doubt this, do you, Fanny?"

She was still sobbing almost hysterically, and squeezing the astonished and half frightened children by turns in her arms, but now she turned to me and stretching out her hand said, with a smile that I thought quite beautiful,—

“I believe everything. I am so enchanted to be here, but I fancy Miss Sinclair scarcely knew what she was about when she sent me, or she must have forgotten my old weakness for the little angels of the earth.”

“It is time *these* little angels of the earth were in bed, so let them bid you good night, dear Fanny, as you and I shall have much to talk about, and unless you are more than human you will be fainting for your supper.”

“Don’t forget the pears, mama,” whispered Mary, timidly, as she raised her face for the last kiss.

“Nor the apples,” echoed Willie, who had overheard his sister’s observation—“do you like apples, ma’am?”

This was addressed to Fanny, who had once more taken the little meek pale face



between her hands, and was gazing into it with an admiration that satisfied even me.

“God bless you, you pure innocent doves!” she said, with another shower of tears. “There, let them go now, dear Mrs. Sinclair, for you see I am making a perfect fool of myself, and what *would* aunty say?”

### CHAPTER III.

THE supper was over, the table cleared, the curtains drawn, and Fanny and myself seated side by side on the large old-fashioned sofa, with the very pleasant feeling that we were going to be together for many months, perhaps years to come, and that we might safely indulge our satisfaction in each other's society, without that fear of speedy separation which is so great a foe to the happiness imparted by fellowship with those we love.

To me, at least, accustomed as I had been to lose the friends most dear to me, this feeling of security in the continued possession of my present companion, was a very important item in the pleasure I was experiencing, and while Fanny was silently eating her supper, I was abundantly content to gaze at her

from time to time and to assure myself that there was no chance of her being taken from me as Bessie Graham, my dear mother, and aunt Katherine had been.

As soon as we were left quite alone, and the door was finally closed, Fanny broke a rather long silence by observing gravely—

“You must not think, my dear Mrs. Sinclair, that I am often going to transgress as I transgressed to-night. Believe me I have been too well tutored for that—besides I feel of course that it was really exceedingly wrong of me.”

“What have you done, Fanny?”

“Made those blessed angel children of yours think me a wild woman out of the woods in the first place, and set them a disgraceful example of ungovernable feeling, in the second.”

“I had no idea you were so enthusiastically fond of children, Fanny.”

“Oh yes, it has been a passion with me from my very childhood, only one that has never had much opportunity of indulgence.

The children I have had the misfortune to instruct for the last two years were none of them greatly calculated to call forth the heart's hidden depths of tenderness. I think the contrast between yours, and all those I have been with lately, had as much to do with my foolish emotion as anything else."

"Did Miss Sinclair never describe my Willie and Mary to you, Fanny?"

"Oh yes, she did, but then you know dear aunty is *not* enthusiastic, and she spent more time in speaking to me of those childish faults which she wished me to watch over and correct, than in talking about that rare and angel loveliness which entered at once into my very heart."

"I am so glad you are interested in them, Fanny. You will not dislike the task of assisting me in their education."

"Dislike it! my dear Mrs. Sinclair, I am only afraid I shall be too happy."

Poor girl! she looked as if she had not been too happy for some time; and in reply to a guarded observation to this effect she said very soberly:—

"I have suffered a little certainly, but I needed every atom it. Auntie has told you a portion of my history I know; but neither auntie nor any other human being has an idea of the strife and rebellion that so long harassed and tormented my weak and infatuated heart."

"Yet how thankful you ought to be, Fanny, that this weak heart was not suffered to lead you into an error from which you could never have extricated yourself."

"I am thankful, *very* thankful, at times," she said slowly, and with a faint colour lighting up her downcast face; "but I feel that I have much to learn yet, dear Mrs. Sinclair, and auntie has found out that I am less satisfied with the result of her care for me than I ought to be."

"May I ask, Fanny, whether the gentleman of whom Miss Sinclair spoke to me is still unmarried?"

"Yes, I believe so," was the low reply, "but I understand he has been abroad for the last twelvemonth. Don't let us talk

about him. You must have such lots to tell me concerning your sweet children."

"Oh yes, that subject is you know with a mother perfectly inexhaustible—but I should tire you to-night, Fanny."

"Ah, how little you understand me if you can think so. Besides are they not to be my own precious and beloved little pupils? Tell me then everything about both of them; and see if you will not have a patient listener."

We sat up till a very late hour, and when at length I wished Fanny good night, and left her in her own room, I felt that I had indeed gained a sister and a friend, and that my Father in Heaven was dealing with a tenderness towards me which even now I ill deserved.

I had a long letter from Miss Sinclair to read before I went to bed, and although every word of it was dictated by that thoughtful and enlightened spirit for which the writer was so remarkable, I shall only trouble the reader with one brief extract, which related more particularly to Fanny and myself.

“I need not,” wrote aunt Katherine, “remind you that in giving Fanny to you as a companion, I am placing an unlimited confidence in those principles which you profess to have imbibed—I refer especially to those principles which teach the sin and folly of ungodly marriages. Without making Fanny the confidante of any positive disagreement between yourself and your husband—which you have no right under any circumstances to do—I think you may easily contrive, in your friendly intercourse, to strengthen her own convictions on the subject, and, by frequently placing before her the clear prohibition contained in God’s holy word, to prevent the indulgence of weak and sinful regrets concerning that escape which should be a constant theme of earnest and heartfelt gratitude. *Bid her remember Lot’s wife.* I am the more anxious just at the present time because I have heard that the object of the unwise attachment is on the point of returning to England, and that he has avowed his intention of gaining Fanny

in spite of all opposition. I believe that the latter is quite ignorant of this, and I need not caution you to let her remain so. In conclusion, I charge you most solemnly to deal faithfully with her you desire to call your friend. Let no mistaken tenderness induce you for a moment to give way in anything which you know to be wrong. It is not improbable that the individual I have spoken of may discover Fanny's abode and seek to have an interview with her. This must, by all means, be prevented. Those who have once stumbled are not fit to be trusted in the same paths again. While beneath your roof, Fanny will respect your wishes; she is bound to do so—but should wishes fail to secure compliance, then let commands be issued, and should even these, under strong temptation, prove ineffectual, then send immediately for me and use those measures in the meantime which may seem to you most judicious and expedient. I do not, however, anticipate that you will have any trouble of this kind. Fanny is wiser



and less impulsive than she was, and she is also I sincerely trust under the guidance of that unerring Teacher who will lead her safely to the city of refuge even in spite of herself. I hope to hear of both of you—that you have been faithful to each other, faithful to the lambs you are appointed to feed, and faithful in the discharge of every Christian duty that circumstances may place in your way. ‘Hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown.’”

I was greatly pleased upon the whole with aunt Katherine’s letter, the confidence she reposed in me could not be otherwise than most flattering and agreeable, and yet in thinking calmly over all she had said about Fanny I was not without a certain degree of misgiving concerning the heavy responsibility that had devolved upon me.

Alas! I had too much reason to know how completely the sentiment we call ‘love’ can blind the understanding, and lead the heart into the commission of follies which a life’s tears are incapable of repairing. I felt

too, that Fanny Cleve had a mind which it might be difficult to deal with, were she once to allow inclination to get the upper hand. And then there was a distant, shadowy fear, which being brought closer, resolved itself into "the individual who had avowed his determination of gaining Fanny in spite of all opposition." What was I to do with him if he really appeared on the scene?

It was so long since I had any anxieties but those immediately connected with myself to dwell upon, that the novel position in which I was placed became as I sat thinking over it something quite formidable, and even threatened to mar a portion of the happiness I felt in having Fanny with me.

"This will never do," I said, at length, as I took up my Bible with a view of turning my thoughts into a pleasanter channel, let us try to remember that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

But there was a word of still stronger consolation waiting for me in that precious book. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

This was what I wanted. This served to remind me that though I was all weakness, there was One who is all strength, One whose will is equal to His power in directing the paths of those who trust in Him, and who has promised to be our shield and hiding place in every day of trouble.

I went to sleep with a light heart, having been enabled to cast my fears and anxieties upon a gracious Saviour, and to implore his assistance in any further difficulties that might assail me.

## CHAPTER IV.

I HAVE said enough of Fanny Cleve to make the reader understand how greatly her society contributed to the happiness of myself and my dear children. With me she had always been a special favourite, and now that our minds were in perfect unison on that subject which tends above every other to the establishment of a strong human friendship, there was a charm in our intercourse which I should find it difficult to describe.

As for Willie and Mary, they both became in a very few days warmly devoted to their young governess, who exercised, I must acknowledge, few of the distinctive privileges of her position, and was only restrained by a strong sense of duty (mingled perhaps with the remembrance of "aunt's" warnings)

from spoiling by the most unlimited indulgence the pupils she had come to train in the paths of wisdom and knowledge.

"There is something so unspeakably attractive and loveable about them," she would sometimes say, when I attempted to play the monitor myself, "that I really cannot scold; and then they are so really anxious to do their best, sweet, precious lambs! that even if they do fail occasionally, who can have the heart to be angry? Ah, if you knew how often I feel inclined, in the midst of our graver studies, to squeeze them in my arms, and weep over them, you would give me credit for the forbearance I exercise."

"But why weep over them, dear Fanny?" I asked one day, in some anxiety, observing that the tears had come to her eyes as she spoke.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied hastily, "it is all my foolish nonsense, of course; but they are so unlike other children, and they have a way of winding and twisting themselves about people's hearts in a manner

that partakes of witchcraft. I know I make a goose of myself; but really I cannot help it."

It was not likely that I, at least, should quarrel with Fanny on account of her attachment to my little ones, but the strength of her feelings made me rather thoughtful at times, and caused me to experience a slight degree of anxiety whenever I heard of any stranger having been seen at Ashvale.

The remainder of the autumn and the succeeding winter passed however quietly over, and I had long ceased to trouble myself about any unknown individual, or to let one fear of Fanny's weakness mar the perfect enjoyment afforded me by her society. The six months she had spent with me were unquestionably the happiest I had ever yet experienced, so happy and peaceful they were, that I sometimes fancied I must be in a delicious dream, from which I should awake to all my former misery.

How the days passed on I scarcely knew. We always said they were too short for what

we had to do, and I suppose this was because we found everything we did so agreeable and delightful. The mornings were wholly devoted to the school room, for I rarely left Fanny alone in her task of instruction, although my own part in it was an insignificant one compared to hers. At one o'clock the lessons were put aside, and an hour devoted to play or gardening, as I had now taken aunt Katherine's hint and taught the children to assist me in cultivating the flowers they had formerly only amused themselves by destroying. At two, we all dined together, there being no fashionable hours at Ashvale, and the afternoons if fine were devoted to long, delightful walks into the country (which gave us frequent opportunities of visiting and relieving the poor of the neighbourhood), and if wet or very cold, to reading by turns some entertaining and instructive work, adapted to the understandings of our little ones.

Hitherto there had been no illness to speak of amongst us, for although Willie had still

a most fragile look, and was decidedly weaker than his sister, there were no symptoms of positive unhealthiness about him, and I fancied the last few months had wrought an unmistakeable improvement in his appearance.

How thankful I felt, as the bright spring once more advanced, to be able to look around me and see my sweet flowers thus expanding into strength and loveliness, to feel too that the calm of my outward life was not mocked by any unholy strife within, and to be able to say from my heart, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name!"

I had received three or four letters from my husband in the course of the winter, but he seemed so well satisfied with his new friends and his new pursuits, whatever these might be, that no mention was made of his return to England, and I had for some time quite ceased to expect him, and to content myself with praying for his conversion, and hoping that some far off day my prayers might be answered.



Occasionally it did occur to me that I felt too little anxiety to remove those obstacles which lay in the way of my doing any real good to Edward. It was undoubtedly true that I could not compel him to return home, it was also exceedingly probable that had I written to him on religious subjects he would not have read my letters; still, there were times when my conscience told me that I made no effort to smooth down these and other difficulties, and that in the absorbing love I felt for my children, I was in danger of forgetting the solemn duty I owed to their father.

If ever mother *could* be excused for idolizing her children, surely, surely I might put in an earnest plea for indulgence. They were so gentle, so docile, so loving and so lovely, that, as Fanny said, one felt irresistibly impelled at times to weep over them, even while the heart was rejoicing in their innocence and happiness.

I use the word innocence merely to express the purity and simplicity of childhood, con-

trusted with the guile and worldliness of riper years. I would not be understood to imply that children have any real innocence in themselves, or that any outward rite performed in infancy can confer it upon them. I hold it as a plain scriptural truth that from the time the soul is capable of committing actual sin—and we all know that this is at an exceedingly early age—nothing but a personal application to the blood of Christ can put away that sin, and bring the individual who has committed it into covenant communion with God.

With regard to my own dear children, I had, at present, no substantial grounds for hoping that the new heart had been sought or the regenerating process begun. They were naturally amiable and tractable, and having been very carefully trained had perhaps fewer of external faults than most children of their age. But I knew it did not follow that grace had any hand in this, since they had been what they were now from the earliest dawn of reason. Neither

could I attach great importance to their interest in religious subjects, their fondness for hymns, and their evident enjoyment of all reading or instruction that related to the mysteries of the future life ; because I was aware that these symptoms were frequently discovered in children brought up amongst religious persons, long before any actual conversion to God took place.

Nevertheless, I was perfectly convinced that there was no opposition to the Truth in either of their hearts ; and I was rarely without a firm trust in their ultimate acceptance of that blessed Gospel which to their young ears was already at least a pleasant sound.

How delightful it was to have a friend like Fanny to whom I could speak freely and unreservedly on this most interesting subject ; a friend who could so entirely sympathize in every emotion I described, and whose fervent prayers were, I well knew, mingled with my own for the salvation of those dear ones over whom we were both so tenderly watching.

Very full of enjoyment were the long quiet summer evenings we spent together, after the children were in bed, sometimes talking on grave and solemn themes, sometimes reading that holy book which we desired to take as "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths," and sometimes silently reviewing our past lives, and finding therein fresh occasion for adoring the long-suffering and the tender mercies of our God.

It must not, however, be understood that either Fanny or myself were without our seasons of depression, of heartlessness, or even of murmurings against the gracious hand that was leading us at present so gently along the paths of our wilderness journey. What, it may reasonably be asked, had we to complain of in the midst of such calm prosperity and happiness? Alas, what had the ungrateful Israelites to complain of as God led them through the wilderness and gave them bread from heaven to eat! Our hearts, like theirs, were earthly still, and needed a hotter furnace to purge away the dross.

I had been remarking for several days that Fanny seemed unusually out of spirits. She talked little to the children, sat much in her own room alone, and appeared anxious to avoid any opportunity of private conversation with myself. I was not aware that she had received bad news; but as she had several correspondents—friends of her younger days,—I thought something of this sort not improbable, and waited patiently till it was her pleasure to make me the sharer of her grief.

“What is the matter with Miss Cleve?” said Willie to me one morning after the studies were over. “She seems so sorry about something, and I am certain she was crying while Mary and I were reading to you.”

“Perhaps she does not feel well, love,” I replied, as the little arm was linked in mine to draw me to the garden. “We must not notice people when they look unhappy, because they may have very good reasons for not telling us the cause.”

“But Miss Cleve is such a darling, mama;

and when anything is the matter with Mary or me she is so, so kind to us that I cannot bear to see her sorry like this."

"Nor can I, my Willie; but we must be patient. Our friend may recover her spirits in a day or two."

At this moment Mary joined us, and I sent the children to play together, thinking that if I were in the drawing room alone, Fanny might choose to come and talk to me.

Finding, however, that at the end of an hour she had not made her appearance, it occurred to me that I ought to seek her, and try at least to win the confidence which the fear of giving me pain might perhaps have been the sole cause of her withholding.

I went therefore at once to the room where I expected to find her, and receiving no answer to my summons for admittance, I opened the door gently, and then stood with it for a moment in my hand.

At the farther end, and half concealed by a curtain from observation, Fanny was on her knees, her head buried in the cushions of

a little sofa, her whole frame shaken with emotion, and smothered sobs rising quickly from the evidently tortured heart.

This was no scene for a stranger to intermeddle with. My very spirit sank within me as I took the first brief survey. Then, softly retreating and closing the door, I went to my own room, and endeavoured to think soberly and calmly over what I had just witnessed.

That poor Fanny had once more been brought by some means or other under the power of her former temptation I could not for an instant doubt. That she was wrestling in prayer against it I was as firmly convinced ; but how far the enemy might be suffered to prevail I could not of course determine, because I knew nothing of her inward emotions, nor to what extent she had already yielded to the wily serpent's voice.

I took out the letter I had received from Miss Sinclair when Fanny first came to me. I read it attentively more than once ; I impressed every word of it that related to my

young friend most firmly on my mind ; but as yet there was nothing for me to do, since Fanny's total reserve placed counsel out of my power, and there seemed no immediate likelihood of any step being taken which might call for my active interference.

When we met at dinner, Fanny was very pale, but less dejected than she had been in the morning ; and during the afternoon she remained amongst us, and exerted herself to amuse the children with a zeal and resolution I could not but admire. There was a poor woman we had promised to visit in the evening, and thinking the necessity for talking and imparting consolation to another would rouse Fanny better than anything else, I persuaded her to go alone, while I took Willie and Mary for a walk in an opposite direction.

While we were out, the children told me that they had been discussing the question of Miss Cleve's evident unhappiness, and that they had arrived at the conclusion that a picnic to the blue bell valley would do her more good than anything in the world.



"You know, mama," said Mary, "how she loves all those pretty wild places like the blue bell valley, and what fun we used to have at our pic-nics last year, when Miss Cleve first came—and then there were no flowers you know, only nuts and blackberries, and Emma Graham says the blue bells will all be out now. Do let us go to-morrow, mama."

"To-morrow ; that is indeed a short notice, my Mary. We might not be able to get the donkies, and the poor pony is not well enough to carry you so far."

"Oh, I daresay we could have the donkies if we ordered them to-night," they both eagerly exclaimed. "Can't we go round by the village now, mama, and call at Mr. Brown's about them?"

Of course "mama" was not very difficult to be persuaded, so round by the village we went, and the donkies not being engaged, we ordered them for the following morning, and did not forget sundry other accessories to the enjoyment of a pic-nic, which the pastry cook was to have the honour of supplying.

Just as all our commissions were executed, and the little ones were revelling in the supreme delight of anticipating the morrow's pleasure, we met Fanny returning from the sick woman's cottage, and I was glad to observe that her countenance was many degrees brighter than when she had set out.

The children could scarcely give her time to communicate to me the result of her visit ere they poured into her sympathizing ears the charming news of the coming pic-nic, expatiating on the anticipated delights of gathering baskets full of blue bells, and of eating cold pies under spreading trees, with an enthusiasm that was as fresh and beautiful as the flowers concerning which they were so marvellously eloquent.

"Happy, happy mother!" said Fanny, in a tone that gave a glimpse into at least one of the troubled well-springs of her secret heart. "What sorrow can there be that a single joyous note from those angel voices will not dissipate!"

I wished earnestly to answer her, but

emotion for awhile prevented me. At length I said, "Yet a mother, Fanny, has trials which the unmarried or the motherless can know nothing of. Depend on it. He who appoints our various lots is the best capable of judging what is good for us."

"I do not doubt it," she replied quickly, "but still, still, when I look at those fairy blossoms, and hear those accents of joy and gladness that thrill through all the heart, I must feel, and I must say, happy, happy mother."

## CHAPTER V.

A **SPLENDID** morning brought the children to my bedside, almost at the dawn of day. Their joyous little faces were as bright as the sunbeams that poured into my room, and I thought nothing on earth could be so sweet as the kisses they pressed with loving, lingering tenderness upon my cheek and lips.

“Good mama, darling mama, please not to go to sleep again. Miss Cleve is dressing as fast as she can, and nurse is gone down to make them get the kettle boiling. I know if we don’t hurry the donkies will be here before breakfast is over.”

“Why, you foolish little things, it isn’t seven o’clock yet! What do you mean by disturbing the whole house in this way? Come here, Mary, and let me pinch those

fat, rosy cheeks of yours, that you may remember to behave better another time."

The rosy cheeks were pressed again to my own, while Willie, declaring he wanted to be punished too, endeavoured to draw his sister away, and then their sweet voices mingled in a joyous silvery laugh; in the midst of which nurse came in and, whispering something about hot milk, lured them both down stairs.

Happy, happy mother! These words of poor Fanny's rang in my heart during all the time I was dressing that morning. They were true, undoubtedly, for I was indeed a happy, happy mother; and yet they made me strangely thoughtful, and kept me, in spite of the children's impatience, half an hour longer than usual in meditation and prayer.

When I entered the breakfast room Fanny was engaged in a full game of romps with her pupils, to keep them from disturbing me, she said; but I saw that her kind, warm heart had been won, for the time, from the contemplation of its own sorrows, to partici-

pate in the joy and mirthfulness of those innocent little beings to whom she was so strongly attached.

I was only allowed fifteen minutes to swallow my breakfast, a confident opinion being expressed that the donkies, although ordered for ten o'clock, would be at the door by nine. Of course these intelligent animals must guess where they were going, and be as anxious to scent the fragrant blue bells as Willie and Mary.

It turned out, however, that they were rather behind than before the appointed hour, which created a prejudice against the whole donkey tribe, lasting until the young riders were actually seated in their saddles.

The enjoyment of a fond mother being a reflected one, shining from her children's hearts into her own, I need say nothing concerning my personal satisfaction during our two hours' ride on that bright spring morning. It would have been impossible for nature to have smiled more sweetly upon

us, or for happier looks to have responded to her smiles. Even Fanny's gloom seemed to have all departed, and to have left her quite as capable of entering into the spirit of our innocent enjoyments as she had ever been.

"What a miracle of loveliness is nature at this season," she observed to me, when a race between the young ones gave us an opportunity of speaking quietly to each other. "Don't you feel sometimes, in a scene like this, as if the emotions of wonder and delight almost took from you the power of breathing, as if some capacity, but imperfectly developed now, were struggling for fuller life, and chafing against the prison bars of the flesh, that keep it from breaking forth, and revelling in the wild ecstasy which is its attribute."

"Yes, I have felt sensations very similar to these; and it has often struck me that our appreciation of the marvellous wonders of nature is amongst those faculties which, having budded in the cold ungenial climate of the earth, will blossom and bear fruit

in the pure and cloudless atmosphere of heaven."

"Ah, that heaven, dear friend! How is it that, with such a prospect, and in view of such a home, the Christian can be careful and cumbered about the many trifles of this fleeting world."

"Because, we are still of the earth, earthy; and often in our foolish infatuation prefer the flowers to the stars. I have had some very serious thoughts this morning, Fanny, which I want to talk to you about by and bye. We shall have a few hours to ourselves when nurse arrives to assist us in managing these young rebels."

"Ah, the little angels, how happy they are!"

"Rather wild angels to-day we must confess. See, they are turning now, and what a bright colour Willie has got from his race."

In consideration for the poor donkies their riders agreed to let them walk quietly the remainder of the way, and as the road was



becoming more and more picturesque, we found an abundance of materials for conversation, and more subjects of interest than we could possibly in so short a time dispose of.

At length, the longed for valley was in sight, and leaving our good little donkies, which had behaved throughout the journey with much discretion, at a small road side inn, with directions that they should be well fed and cared for, we all rushed down upon the clustering blue bells, like a cruel enemy besieging a defenceless city.

Half an hour sufficed to fill our baskets, to give us an opportunity of admiring the rich, undulating scenery around us, and to remind us that, in spite of our ecstasies, we were still sufficiently human to be sensible of the pure bracing air upon our appetites. In short, we were all becoming keenly interested in the arrival of dinner, which nurse was to bring in the carrier's cart that fortunately happened to be passing the valley on that particular day.

It was a new amusement for the little

ones to run backwards and forwards from the valley to the road to ascertain if the cart were in sight. The sound of distant wheels lent wings to their tiny feet, and filled the air with shouts of merriment, when a voyage of discovery proved the fallacy of our hope.

But every thing must have an end some time, and hope being at length changed into certainty, our dear good nurse, who looked quite as happy as the children, was welcomed with enthusiastic demonstrations of pleasure, and made to rest herself on the soft green turf, while Willie and Mary unpacked the hamper, took out the tempting delicacies it contained, and, spreading a snowy cloth beneath a magnificent cedar, invited us all to gather round it, and test the merits of the cold pies and chickens which were waiting for our approval.

What a merry party we were! What peals of laughter ran along the quiet valley, mingling with the distant note of the cuckoo, and with the nearer sounds of a little twinkling brook beneath us, and the joyous shout-

ing of some fearless birds in the tree above our heads.

"How nice it is, how beautiful!" said Willie, whose appetite was the soonest appeased; "don't you wish we could stay here always, Mary, and have a tent to live in like the soldiers when they go to battle? What fine times we should have, shouldn't we?"

"Oh, I should be so pleased," replied Mary, who had never been known to have an opposite opinion to her brother's, "and you and I could do all the work for mama. She wouldn't want any servant, would she?"

"Except this dear old nurse, who is never, never going to leave us. Here, nurse, let me give you another glass of cider; I am sure you are as thirsty as you can be."

Thus they prattled away, till we had all finished our rural repast; when, disdaining the idea of quietude after eating, the young ones scampered off into the depths of the valley, leaving poor nurse to follow them at her leisure, and Fanny and myself to enjoy

unmolested the delicious and soul-subduing tranquillity of the scene.

We had each of us brought a little book in our pocket, and to these we had recourse during the half hour immediately succeeding dinner, but it was never very easy to me to read profitably in the open air ; and guessing that my companion's thoughts were not more settled than my own, I stooped down suddenly to look into her face, and saw that it was wet with tears.

“Fanny —”

“Oh don't mind me, there's a dear, good creature. I am not crying for sorrow. I really don't know what I am crying for. There is something overpowering in this place, I think.”

“It has certainly a tendency to excite deep and serious thought. But what were you thinking of, Fanny, when I interrupted you just now?”

“Of that verse in one of David's psalms which says, ‘O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest.’”

"You *are* unhappy then, Fanny?"

"No—only dissatisfied with myself, and longing for the time when the fight shall have been fought, the battle won. It may seem a cowardly feeling, but it is surely not unnatural, when our weaknesses and infirmities are unnerving the arms that should be ever ready to wield the sword against every spiritual enemy."

"We have not to fight alone, Fanny. This knowledge ought to cheer and strengthen us in our worst encounters. Don't you remember that verse in Willie's favourite hymn,—

"Though hot the fight, why quit the field,  
Why should I either flee or yield,  
Since Jesu is my living shield?"

"Yes, it is very true that we ought to require nothing more than the assurance of our Saviour's presence to enable us to struggle through the deepest waters. But some of us, alas! remain sadly human, even after we have bidden adieu to the land and to the idols of Egypt."

"It is because, perhaps, we do not realize sufficiently the danger of indulging in those things which the Word of God explicitly declares to be wrong."

I said this more in reference to what I imagined to be the subject of my companion's thoughts, than in answer to her last observation. She replied quickly:—

"But do you not think it possible for two persons—both equally desirous of discovering the truth—to take different views, or rather, understand in a different way any particular command or injunction?"

"I confess I should be more inclined to believe that there was some film before the eyes of one of these persons interfering with the clearness of his vision, than that a command of God's could be so obscure as to cause two equally sincere individuals to understand it differently."

Fanny sighed, but made no attempt to combat this opinion.

"You will live to rejoice in that which now seems such a hard cross to bear," I said presently.

"I am not so sure of this," she replied, with an abruptness that somewhat startled me. "*You* have not a very unhappy destiny, at any rate. With those angel children, you could not be otherwise than most richly blessed, even if you lacked all earthly enjoyments beside!"

"God forbid, dear Fanny, that the smoothness of my present path should be a stumbling block to you! This is not the first time that I have fancied it might become so. But oh, if you knew how much I *have* suffered, you would not grudge me a little rest, even though, as I am quite ready to acknowledge, I have deserved none."

"*I* grudge you your happiness!" exclaimed the warmhearted Fanny, throwing her arms round my neck, and bursting into tears; "oh, what a wretch I must be to have said a word that could lead to such a notion. Nay, believe me, it is my constant, ceaseless prayer, that you may be doubly and trebly blessed in every relation of life. I am so enraged at my own weakness and

folly that you must not be surprised if my judgment is less clear than usual."

"Poor Fanny! I *can* feel for you."

"Aunty would not say—Poor Fanny. She would box my ears, and put me upon bread and water, if she knew I was giving a single thought to the forbidden subject."

"I had hoped that time had completely reconciled you to the sacrifice you made for conscience-sake."

"That Miss Sinclair made for me, rather; for I have not even the poor merit of which a voluntary resistance of the temptation might have conferred upon me. It is true, however, that I believed I had long since acquiesced in the decision that one wiser than myself had formed, and only within the last week I have discovered what a frail; sinful, unworthy and ungrateful creature I am."

"You have heard from Mr. —."

"Yes—he is in England again."

"He is acting a very dishonourable part in writing to you."



Fanny was silent.

"Is further counsel or admonition necessary, Fanny?"

"I hope not;" she said slowly—"even if I fail to see the matter, quite as you and Miss Sinclair see it, I can of course have no doubt as to which is the safest path. In this I have determined to walk; and I would earnestly entreat your prayers that I may walk in it cheerfully, without murmur or regret for that which can now never be."

"You will do so, after awhile, dear Fanny. I do not doubt that, even in this world, it will be made abundantly evident to you that your choice has been a wise one. Who knows but what my experience may yet be of a nature to convince you of the folly and danger of taking that step to which you appear to attach so little importance."

"Oh, I sincerely hope *your* troubles will never be employed to teach me anything. You have suffered severely already; and why should not your remaining days be peace and joy in Him whom you have trusted?"

"I cannot expect it—I can scarcely wish it, Fanny. I wanted to tell you how much I was struck by a portion this morning, just as I had been dwelling on those words—'happy, happy mother,' that you addressed to me last night."

"What was it?"

"This—'If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? *But if ye be without chastisement whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.*' Now it seemed to me, Fanny, as I read this, that my Heavenly Father was thus kindly preparing me for some approaching calamity. I have been very, very happy for a long period, far more so than I could ever deserve to be; and I sincerely trust that, in remembrance of past mercies, I shall be enabled to bow meekly beneath the chastening rod when it comes. I would only entreat—and oh, dear friend, let your prayers in this matter be joined to mine,—that come whatever storm there may, it touch not one

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hair of the heads of my little ones. Let *me* bear all and suffer all; but let my tender, precious lambs escape!"

The very thought of suffering reaching my innocent children, excited me so violently, that I was obliged for a few minutes to bury my face in my hands, and sob aloud. Fanny was all sympathy and tenderness. She thought I was gathering needless shadows around my path. It appeared to her that while sunshine was granted me, I ought to enjoy it, and avoid anticipating future troubles, which, perhaps, might never come.

"This is so far true," I replied, "that I feel justified in accepting with a thankful heart those gifts of peace and gladness that have lately been so bountifully showered upon me. But undisturbed prosperity is not good for the soul—of this I am firmly convinced. It disposes us to be content with the things of the present world, and to dwell less frequently on the glories of that which is to come. I can remember, in my days of alienation from God, thinking that if ever I could succeed in

realizing my personal interest in Christ, I should be ready and anxious that same minute to depart, and be with Him. But since I have found so many joys on earth, I am not only grateful for prolonged life, (which every Christian ought to be, for the purpose of serving God), but I feel as if it would be anguish unspeakable to leave the world where my beloved ones were still abiding."

"I fear you do cling too fondly to those precious loves ; but *I* cannot chide you for it, as Miss Sinclair would. If they were mine, I should do just the same."

"How am I to moderate my affection, Fanny?"

"Confess it as a sin, if you really feel that it comes between your soul and Christ. I know of no other way."

"Could any mother love such children less?"

"Bless them !—there is the echo of their dear, merry voices. How sweet it is to hear a young child's laugh ! No—I do not see how you could love them less—were they not given you to love?"

"Then may this love be the one sweet drop in whatever bitter cup it may please the Lord hereafter to put into my hands. I feel that I should have strength to bear anything, while my children were spared to me."

Before Fanny could speak again, the little wanderers appeared in sight. They were fairly tired out at last, and ready to go home to tea. We made them, however, sit down for a quarter of an hour beside us; and, at Willie's suggestion, we all sang together the hymn he was so fond of, and which my own recent thoughts had made peculiarly appropriate to the occasion.

The ride home, in spite of our fatigue, was a very delightful one, the evening being mild and beautiful, and the spirits of the whole party sobered, but not depressed by the little excitement of the day. Fanny kept the children amused by talking to them of the different objects we passed on the road; and I, being thus left free to indulge my own thoughts, wandered into the wide realm of the untrodden future, in which I saw many

things that looked strangely upon me from the distance, and heard many sounds that would have stricken me with terror, had not the first verse of Willie's hymn rang with an opposing melody in my ear, and bade all sights and sounds of woe, begone. Truly, it was worth every earthly joy that the heart of man could conceive to be able, thus to say—

“Why should I fear the darkest hour,  
Or tremble at the tempest's power,  
Since Jesu is my living tower!”



## CHAPTER VI.

"ANY letters, any news?" we asked on our arrival at home, of the servant who had walked out to the gate to see if we were coming.

"No letters, ma'am ; but a gentleman has been waiting here all the afternoon to see Miss Cleve ; I told him I expected you about five o'clock, and he stayed till a quarter past six."

"Only just gone, then ?" I said, thinking that Fanny would be little inclined to make any observation.

"It is near seven now, ma'am. Sarah and me were beginning to be afraid something had happened—and Master Willie does look pale to be sure, and bless me so

does Miss Cleve. I hope there's been no accident with them obstinate donkies?"

"None, whatever, Jane," I replied quickly, "we are only excessively tired, and almost fainting for some tea. Run and tell Sarah to get it ready immediately, while you put on your bonnet and fetch the boy for the donkies."

Having thus disposed of one pair of curious eyes, I made nurse busy herself with the children, and then, going round to Fanny, I whispered to her that she should have her tea in her own room, and that I would come to her the moment I had done with the little ones.

She squeezed my hand in token of gratitude, but assured me it would be better for her to exert herself; so we all went in, and had tea together; and, at its conclusion, Fanny took as usual the leading part in our evening hymn, and afterwards assisted me in getting the children to bed, as nurse was very tired, and quite unfit for any further effort.

"You have had a happy day, my precious ones," I said, as I bent by turns over the small white curtained beds in which my treasures were lying.

"Oh, so happy, mama," replied Willie first, as he drew me nearer to him, and kissed me till he was almost breathless. "Do promise, there's a darling mama, that we shall soon have another picnic."

"The happiest day of all my life," echoed Mary in her turn, as raising her bright, rosy face from the pillow, she twined her arms round my neck, and bestowed on me an embrace not less ardent than Willie's had been. "We do so love you, mama, for being so good to us."

"But both my dear ones must remember," I said, "the source from which all their blessings flow. I hope they will neither of them forget to thank that Great and Merciful God, who has given them a day of such unmingled enjoyment, and whose ears are ever open to the prayers and praises of little children."

"I do wish to love Him and to be one of His lambs, mama," whispered Mary earnestly; and although my Willie said nothing, there was an expression on his sweet, thoughtful face that gave me quite as much satisfaction as his sister's words had done.

"Well, are you not indeed a happy, happy mother?" exclaimed Fanny, as we went down stairs together. "Can you picture to yourself more perfect felicity than the possession of those little angels must afford you?"

"I *feel* my rich blessing too intensely, at times, to be able to talk about them, Fanny. But who knows ——? Ah what a glorious thing it will be when we are united for ever in Heaven—no more partings, no more anxieties, no more tears for any sorrows."

A sigh that seemed to come from the heart's depths answered this; and when we were safely closeted in our own little sitting room, I asked my companion if she had anticipated the visit of the afternoon, and what she intended doing should it be repeated.

"I was not surprised," she said frankly, and evidently making an effort to throw off the dejection that was too strong for her, "because he threatened to come, if his letter was not answered. I could not answer it; I thought I might say too much, or too little. I know pretty well where my own weakness lies, and I am sure I did wisely in not writing."

"But if you feared to trust yourself with writing to him, you surely would not risk a personal interview, Fanny?"

"Decidedly not," she said, in a tone that seemed to remove a load of responsibility from my shoulders, "how could you suspect me capable of such weakness?"

I recollected my own weakness and culpability in similar circumstances; and was led once more to marvel at my present exemption from the sufferings I had so rashly entailed upon myself.

"Forgive me, dearest Fanny, if I wronged you for a moment. But what, then, is to be done if this person comes again?"

“He must be simply informed that I cannot see him—unless you ——”

“Would see him for you? I will certainly do so if you desire it—but you must give me full instructions as to what you wish me to tell him.”

“I would rather leave all to you. My determination you know already; and to this you can add exactly what you please.”

It was a task from which I anticipated little satisfaction, and one that I would most gladly have delegated to abler hands; but, situated as I was with regard to my young inmate, I felt it a duty to smooth to the utmost of my power the difficulties in her path, and to do that which I believed her former guardian would have done.

I did not sleep much that night; and during all the time I was awake, I could hear Fanny, whose room was next to mine, pacing up and down, as if in a state of extreme restlessness and perturbation. I knew I could do no good by going to her; she had a better Friend to listen to her

sorrow, and I was convinced that the time would come when she would see clearly the wisdom and the love which were guiding her in a way so adverse to the natural heart's desires at present.

The next morning, we had scarcely finished breakfast, when a sharp, determined ring at the gate bell announced an unusual visitor ; and I had just time to remark poor Fanny's rapid change of colour, and to hope Jane would have the sense to take our guest, whoever it might be, into the drawing room, when the door was opened and the words, "The gentleman who was here yesterday for Miss Cleve," fell with no welcome sound upon our attentive ears.

"You have shown him into the drawing room, Jane?" I asked, rising and placing myself so as best to screen Fanny from observation ;—"did he not give you a card, or send in his name? I forgot to ask you this, yesterday."

"He said his name was of no consequence, ma'am ; that Miss Cleve would be expecting him."

"Very well, that will do. See that the drawing room door is closed."

Fanny was deathly pale when I turned to speak to her, but there was not the slightest indication of wavering, or irresolution, in her face. She said, in answer to the question I put to her :

"I prefer leaving the matter entirely in your hands. As a message from me, tell him only that his conversion will ever be the subject of my earnest prayers, and that I entreat him to make the word of God his constant study."

I felt very strangely as I walked alone towards the room where I was to encounter one who was doubtless expecting a far different meeting. I remembered my own days of passion and folly, and had real pity in my heart for both the individuals, the decree of whose separation I was expected calmly to pronounce, as if time had bereft me of all power to sympathize with so natural a sorrow.

I wish it to be understood that I did



sympathize most warmly, not only with Fanny, whom I knew and loved, but with the yet unknown companion of her present trial, and therefore it is not likely that my manner towards the latter, exhibited any unkindness or severity, of a nature to excite the animosity of the gentleman in question.

Mr. Leslie was standing, when I entered the room ; but he turned quickly, on hearing the door open, and his face, certainly one of the handsomest I had ever seen, became set to extreme haughtiness and indignation, when he perceived a stranger, instead of the friend he expected.

“ Am I to understand, madam,” he began unceremoniously, “ that Miss Cleve is under the same bodily treatment here, to which she was so unjustly and absurdly subjected with that insane relative of hers, some two years ago, when I demanded a personal interview?”

“ Miss Cleve is her own mistress in my house,” I replied, with as much dignity as my nervousness allowed me to assume. “ She has requested me to answer any questions

you may desire to propose, and to excuse her from consenting to an interview."

He was silent for a minute or two, as if searching for words forcible enough to express his disapproval of such a brief settling of the matter. At length he said, with a sudden change of countenance, that appeared to me quite marvellous :

"As I cannot doubt, Madam, that your influence over Miss Cleve is of a very powerful nature, may I not hope that you will exert this influence in persuading your friend to see me, if only for a few minutes?"

I neither liked the tone, nor the look ; so I replied, perhaps rather more decisively than under other circumstances I should have done :

"Did I really possess the influence you attribute to me, Mr. Leslie, I certainly should not use it in persuading one I highly esteem, and whose conduct in the present case I cannot but applaud, to do that which her conscience would disapprove."

Hitherto, since the commencement of our

conversation, he had been sitting ; but now he rose with an abruptness that startled me, and exclaimed passionately :

“ I think I might be almost excused, after this communication of your sentiments, from doubting Miss Cleve’s free agency :—but forgive me,” he added, again cooling down as if by magic, “ I scarcely know what I am saying. You agreed, I believe, to answer any questions concerning your friend that I might wish to propose ?”

“ Any that refer to the subject on which you desired to speak with her.”

“ I should like then to know, in the first place, the exact and definite grounds on which I am to be so unceremoniously rejected by Miss Cleve, and her careful guardians.”

“ I presume you were not left in ignorance of these on the former occasion to which you have alluded ?”

“ Pardon me ; I was told nothing further than that my proposals were declined on the part of Miss Cleve’s relative. I heard indirectly that the young lady had been placed

under lock and key, which led me not unnaturally to the conclusion that she had no hand in the treatment I received."

"You must nevertheless have gleaned enough in your intercourse with Miss Cleve herself, to have been somewhat prepared for opposition to your wishes."

He raised his head, and replied with a look of most contemptuous incredulity, "I really could not entertain seriously the very quaint idea of being objected to because my religious principles were of a less enthusiastic nature than those of the young lady to whose hand I aspired. I had fancied, in my ignorance it seems, that a good moral character, unexceptionable connections, and a fair position in society would have sufficed as credentials for entering any family in England."

"With those who acknowledge no higher laws than the customs of the world, I have no doubt that it would be so. But Miss Cleve desires to rule her conduct by the law of God; and, as a disciple of Christ, she would be disobeying this law by uniting

herself to an unbeliever. Her resolution is not to be shaken ; but she authorized me to say, that she should ever pray earnestly for your conversion ; and that she implored of you to make the word of God your constant study."

How I got through all this, I really do not know ; for I had never in my life had so unpleasant a task to perform ; and the moment the words were out of my mouth, and I was encountering the proud and flashing eye of my companion, I felt that, had my life depended on it, I could not have said the same again.

"Miss Cleve is excessively kind and obliging," was the cold, disdainful answer to my last communication ; "Assure her from me, that I appreciate the interest she feels in my—I really forget the word you employed ; but, though it is one with which I am not familiar, I presume it means my becoming a saint like herself, *and her friends!* With regard to her request concerning my future studies, I would only observe that she has

deprived me of the only inducement to the course she recommends that could' ever have influenced me. Hereafter, I shall be the sport of circumstances, and probably as mischievous a member of society as my worst enemy could desire."

I felt as Mr. Leslie spoke, that I could not be sufficiently grateful for the strength which had enabled Fanny to resist the temptation of a personal interview. The idea, skilfully and artfully suggested, of being the means of driving a disappointed lover into courses of sin and folly, has, I believe, led hundreds of young women to act against the dictates of conscience, and to throw themselves away upon men who, after all, are *not* restrained from the evil they feigned to dread only as the consequence of being rejected.

"Is there anything more I can do for you, Mr. Leslie?" I asked, and if my voice expressed half the commiseration I felt, it should have deprecated all angry feeling on the part of my listener.

"Nothing, I thank you," he said with the

chilling haughtiness I had at first remarked in him ; “ I must apologize for having so long detained you from your friend. The offence shall not be repeated.”

With this he rose, bowed with cold politeness, and moved towards the door.

Had there been the least softness, or even somewhat more of courteousness, in his manner, I could not have let him go without a word of kindness and sympathy ; but, as it was, I knew not how to introduce it, and the utmost I could do was to wish him good morning, (a ceremony which he had evidently forgotten to perform towards me), and accompany him to the corridor outside. Then, as he ran down the stairs with a velocity that was quite startling, I returned to ring the bell, and stood at the window to see him pass through the garden.

The children were on the lawn working at their flower beds, and the sound of their voices must have struck Mr. Leslie as he went by ; for suddenly his bowed head was raised, and he paused for a minute or two to

contemplate the little creatures who had disturbed him.

Willie, thinking probably that the stranger was admiring the flowers, plucked a beautiful carnation, and carried it to him. A short dialogue then took place, at the conclusion of which Mr. Leslie passed quickly on, and Willie returned, with a graver look than usual, to his sister.

I was anxious to know what had been said; but my first duty was towards poor Fanny, whom I found in her own room, in a more troubled and restless state than I could have desired to witness.

"You are come to scold me," she said, looking up with a faint, cheerless smile as I entered, "but this is to be my last, my very last indulgence in a weakness that none can despise more heartily than myself. Have you anything to tell me?"

"I will relate every particular of the interview, if you think it desirable, dear Fanny," I replied, sitting down beside her, "but if you *can* restrain your curiosity,



I am of opinion that the less we now talk on the subject, the better it will be for you."

"I will only ask you one question. Are you disposed, from what has taken place, to think well of Mr. Leslie, independently of his want of religion?"

"Will you have a candid answer?"

"Certainly. I could expect no other."

"Then I must frankly acknowledge, that he has appeared to me in a very unamiable light. Pride and self-approbation are remarkably conspicuous in his character; and apart from personal attractions, and the regard he professes for you, I should be at a loss to understand how such an individual could ever have won your affections."

"You do not know what induced him to return to England and see me again?"

"No—he gave no explanation of any part of his conduct."

"It was because he had heard of my loss of fortune, and thought to raise me to a position of independence. Had you seen

his letter (I have destroyed it now) you would perhaps wonder less at the weakness I have betrayed ; and at the same time acknowledge that there may be streaks of sunlight breaking through the most clouded skies."

"Poor Fanny—it must indeed have been, under these circumstances, a hard battle for you."

"Not because I care for the independence, but because generosity is to me such an attractive quality ; and because the proof it afforded of Mr. Leslie's continued attachment, went down into the very depths of my foolishly tender heart."

"You have been mercifully preserved through a fiery temptation, Fanny. Be thankful, and cast aside all vain regrets. I feel perfectly persuaded that Mr. Leslie would make no wife happy, much less one who loves the Truth which he appears to despise."

"His feelings, I know, are ungovernable ; but it is so natural to hope all things for those we like."

“Yet think into what incalculable mischief that ‘hoping all things’ may lead, if we act upon it in defiance of the positive injunctions of Scripture.”

“I shall feel better, now it is all over. The great struggle was to remain from answering his letter;—but I had told aunty that I would never, under any circumstances, correspond with him again; and I felt that, if I wrote once, I should be likely to write a second time.”

“Will you come down into the garden now? The air is beautiful this morning, and I am sure it will refresh and cheer you.”

“May I ask for one day—only one, to spend alone? It will do me good, indeed it will; and I promise you that henceforth you shall have no cause to complain of me. You are looking grave, my dear friend. If you disapprove of my request, I withdraw it.”

“Dear Fanny—I am far, very far from disapproving. You shall do exactly what

you please ; and may all the tempted children of God be enabled to go through the fire and through the water as you have done."

On leaving her I sought my little ones, and enquired of Willie what had passed between him and the stranger gentleman in the garden.

"I don't like him at all," said Mary before her brother could answer me. "He never thanked Willie for his beautiful flower, but kept staring at him in such a funny way."

"But he spoke to you, my Willie, did he not?"

"Yes, he asked me my name, and when I told him, he said, 'Ah! you're a fine little fellow, but I expect you are getting spoiled at home. Why doesn't your father send you to school?' I told him we had a nice governess who taught us everything; and then he got quite red, and looked so angry at me, that I was almost frightened. Just as he was turning away, he said—Doesn't your mama want you to go to school? and I told him you didn't, and that I didn't

want to go either ; but he hurried off after that, without wishing me good bye, or anything."

"Wasn't he a disagreeable gentleman, mama?" said Mary, when Willie had finished—"I hope he won't come here again."

"He will not," I replied absently, for Willie's communication had excited many strange and unpleasant thoughts in my mind. I had not liked Mr. Leslie's look or manner from the first. A person of ungovernable feelings, without a particle of religion, evidently possessed with the idea that I was influencing Fanny against him—what a man to have for an enemy.

Yet, what power could he possibly exercise over me or mine ; through what means could he do us an injury or withhold from us any good ? It seemed absurd in the extreme to have one uneasy thought about him, when in all probability he would not remember my existence above a month from the present time. Nevertheless this man came like a shadow between me and every pleasant thought

during the whole of that day ; and in my dreams at night I saw him drag my children from me, while he accused me, in the bitterest terms, as the destroyer of his happiness.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE children had been quite unhappy at the indisposition of their dear governess. They had hoped that the pic-nic would have effected a complete and immediate cure, and this having failed, they were at a loss to know what they could think of next. Several times during the day of Fanny's seclusion I heard them whispering eagerly together, and in the evening there was a petition that they might go down with nurse to the village, and have a shilling each out of the little purses I kept for them.

"Please not to ask any questions, mama, because we could not tell you for the world, but perhaps if you are very good you may know something to-morrow."

“Kiss me then, you little saucy things, and promise that you will not stay out late, nor spend your money foolishly.”

The kiss and the promise were both given, and they set off, hand in hand, in high spirits, and looking as full of importance as if a diplomatic mission had been entrusted to them.

I heard nothing further of their errand that night, but I was much amused at the glances of joyous intelligence that passed between them on their return, and at the immense effort it cost them both to keep the secret safe within their little rosy, laughing lips.

The following morning when I went into Fanny's room I found her dressed and quite prepared, as she assured me, to resume all her customary duties. The children had already been in to see how she was, and had begged that she would make haste down to breakfast.

“Come, then,” I said, “for there is evidently some great mystery brooding over



us, and I shall feel relieved when its nature is more fully disclosed."

We were not kept much longer in suspense, for directly our morning worship was concluded, the little ones hurried Fanny into the breakfast room, and then ran off to the garden themselves, where through the glass doors they could watch the effect of the surprise they had prepared for her.

A splendid nosegay, tastefully put together and tied with blue ribands, was the first object that presented itself, laying beside Fanny's plate, but on raising this, a small prettily bound book was discovered, to which was attached a piece of paper, bearing in my Willie's best writing the following words—

" For our dear Miss Cleve,  
With the fondest and truest love of  
Her affectionate friends,  
Willie and Mary Sinclair,  
Who hope she will never be ill  
Nor sorry again, because it makes  
Willie and Mary very unhappy to see her so."  
The book was called "Affection's Offer-

ing," and a little marker worked by Mary was placed within it against a poem entitled, "The sun will shine to-morrow."

Long before we had possessed ourselves of all these particulars, Fanny's tears were raining fast upon the nosegay she seemed to be admiring, and my own eyes were dim, though I was making fierce grimaces of disapproval at my companion.

"The innocent, precious lambs, the tender lovely darlings!" exclaimed Fanny at length, as she brushed away the tears that were immediately succeeded by others, and kissed the flowers and the book with an earnestness and enthusiasm that belonged to her alone. "Where are they, where have they hidden those little angel faces?—Oh what a simpleton they do make of me; but isn't it pretty, isn't it touching, isn't it lovely of them?"

The children, who had been peeping nearly all the time, now opened the glass doors, and rushed into the room.

"Oh, you mustn't cry, indeed you mustn't—we meant to make you happy. We want

to see you laugh and be merry as you used to be. Dear, darling Miss Cleve, what are you crying so for, now?"

"Because you are the little angels of the earth, and I am not worthy of your affection," she replied, as they both sprang to her arms, and clung round her with the most winning tenderness. "But I will be happy henceforth, my dear ones, you shall see how I can value your gift, and the love that prompted it. There, Mary has kissed away my last tear—bless those rosy lips! and now Willie must smooth the hair that all this embracing has disturbed. What little cannibals you are, both of you—I expect mama and myself shall be found eaten up one of these days. But let us have some breakfast now, for I am quite dying to read my pretty book, and to put these lovely flowers in water. One more kiss, you syrens, and then tell me whether the sun is not shining to-day, without waiting for to-morrow."

Fanny kept her word faithfully, and

whatever might have been her inward struggles or depressions, maintained from this time a uniformly cheerful demeanour, and entered into every little joy or disappointment of her pupils with even greater zeal and earnestness than she had done before.

Very smoothly and delightfully our lives flowed on during the next two months, and in the quiet undisturbed tranquillity I was enjoying, my mind had almost ceased to dwell on those anticipations of coming sorrow, which were exercising so powerful an influence over it, at the time of our excursion to the blue bell valley. But towards the end of that summer I received a letter from my husband, one passage of which gave me, I knew not why, a considerable degree of uneasiness. Yet it was only this—

“I have recently made the acquaintance of a Mr. Leslie, of whom I believe you and your friend Miss Cleve know something also. He is a clever, agreeable fellow, but going I

suspect rather too fast, which he attributes to Miss C——'s rejection of his proposals. I think you were very unwise, my dear Ruth, to meddle with the affair, as he would no doubt have gained his point but for your interference, and it is really a pity to see so fine a young man taking to gambling and other stupid practices, just because he could not marry the woman he wanted."

In a postscript were also these words—"By the bye, Leslie tells me that he caught a glimpse of the young ones, and that they are beautiful as the children of a dream, particularly Willie, who it seems had some talk with him. I think I must take a run across the Channel, and see how you are all getting on."

I have said that the passage or rather passages I have quoted, gave me considerable uneasiness, but I must explain that this uneasiness had reference chiefly to the vague dread I had conceived of Mr. Leslie, which his acquaintance with my husband appeared to invest with more meaning than I had

hitherto been willing to ascribe to it. The anticipation of seeing Edward again was very far from disagreeable to me, as I hoped when he found how well Willie had been getting on with his governess, he would not object to my keeping him at home a year or two longer.

Besides this, I had lately been thinking much of my husband, and desiring ardently that he could be brought to participate in the rich blessings bestowed upon me. I fancied that if he could see how happy I now was in the fulfilment of the duties I once shrank from, if he could be brought under the hallowing and soothing influences of our peaceful home, and above all, if he would listen to the pure teachings of his lovely and innocent children, his mind would be constrained to bow before the Truth, and he would no longer content himself with picking up the pebbles on the sea-shore.

Fanny and myself conversed often on the subject of his return, and together with the children formed various plans for making his

visit a pleasant one. Willie was to hasten on with his Latin to surprise papa when he arrived, and Mary was to do a little drawing, and to learn a tiny melody on the piano, that she too might come in for her meed of approbation.

But no other letter followed the one to which I have referred, and we began to think that Paris had still too many attractions to yield its claims, even for a few weeks, to quiet Ashvale. This judgment, however, was premature.

One sweet Sabbath evening at the end of September, we were all walking in the orchard on our return from the afternoon service, and Willie (who had a singularly retentive memory) was repeating a portion of the sermon which had not been quite clear to him. (I had for some little time observed with great satisfaction that his mind seemed concentrating itself more exclusively on religious subjects than it had formerly done.)

While occupied in the manner above described, we were all suddenly startled by

hearing a voice behind us, exclaiming—  
“Bravo, my young priest, excellent ! I could not give a better sermon myself if I read it from a book. You shall be a bishop one of these days—yes, it is actually papa come home at last !”

These concluding words were in answer to the children’s astonished exclamations, and were followed by such a warm and earnest welcoming on their parts, that even had they been less lovely and attractive than they were, no father’s heart could have remained untouched or unsubdued.

“Are they not beautiful, Edward ?” I said, when, the general greetings over, Fanny walked on with the little ones, leaving my husband and myself together ; “have I not taken good care of the treasures you confided to my keeping ?”

“They are not amiss, certainly”—he replied in a well pleased tone ; “but Leslie told me there was something out of the common way about them.”

“Don’t you think that Willie particularly has improved within the last year ?”



"Yes, he looks stronger—but I hope you have made him more of a man than he used to be. I could have declared that I should find you all singing psalms or some such —."

"Never mind, dear Edward," I said gently, "you will I am sure, for my sake, respect our customs at Ashvale, even if you refuse to adopt them yourself."

"Oh, of course I don't care what you do, if it makes you happy; only, as I have often told you before, these things are not fit for boys who will require to rough it through the world in a way that you women can know nothing about."

"I don't see why Willie should be exposed much to this roughing system—but even if he were, what better preparation could I give him for it than by leading him to the source of all wisdom and strength and truth?"

"Exactly," my husband replied, with the manner of one who had resolved not to be drawn into an argument—"but my dear Ruth, I hope your customs at Ashvale do not include fasting on the Sabbath day, because



I have brought a capital appetite with me, and if you have no objection we will go in and get some tea and whatever else your larder can bestow upon a hungry traveller."

There occurred only one unpleasant circumstance to interrupt the harmony of that first evening.

The children had amused their father by their innocent prattling during all the time we sat at the tea table, and had communicated, amongst other things, the fact of their having been more than commonly industrious in anticipation of his arrival, detailing their respective achievements with a satisfaction that proved them not altogether deficient in the organ of self-esteem.

"Come now, then," said Edward, throwing himself on the sofa as soon as the claims of hunger had been satisfied—"let us have a specimen of your Latin scholarship, master Preacher, there—I want to ascertain the capabilities of my fair cousin for training young gentlemen for the Church."

"What do you mean, papa?" asked

Willie, for I knew that he could be trusted to answer his father, and therefore purposely remained silent.

“Mean, why what should I mean, but that I am waiting to hear you decline a Latin verb.”

“Dear papa, it is Sunday!” and the little pale face became crimson, from some inward emotion which even I could but imperfectly guess.

“Well, I know that, but what then? Do you think parsons never do any thing but read their sermons, or sing hymns out of church.—Nonsense, when you are a bishop you will tell a different tale I can promise you.”

“Then I will never *be* a bishop, papa, because God tells us to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and we can’t be keeping it holy if we do the same things that we do on the week days.”

“Humph!” said Edward, “I suppose you are going into orders next week. Well, have it your own way now. Perhaps Mary

will not think it an unpardonable sin to shew me her drawing."

Poor Mary thus appealed to looked up timidly, and replied that she would rather leave it till the next day, and then Edward declaring he did not know what to make of us all, closed his eyes and was soon in a sound sleep.

I took an opportunity of pointing out to the children how they had brought this unpleasant dilemma upon themselves, by making their accomplishments a subject of Sabbath conversation; but a remark from Mary shewed me once more what difficulty I should have, whenever my husband was at home, in steering between the rocks in the midst of which my own folly and disobedience had cast me.

"Papa wouldn't care," she said, "for hearing us talk as we do to you and Miss Cleve—and you know, mama, you told us to do all we could to amuse and make him happy, when he came home."

"But of course we ought to think of

pleasing God first," replied my sober Willie ; and I bent down to kiss them both that they might not see the tears that I felt rushing impetuously to my eyes.

When Edward awoke, he was in a very good humour, and he made no attempt to leave the room when we all assembled for evening prayers, telling Fanny, at their conclusion, that her voice was an exceedingly pretty one, and that she might sing another hymn to him while I was putting the children to bed.

The next day the Latin was repeated, the drawing exhibited, and the tune on the piano played. Nothing could be more flattering to the dear little students than their father's admiration of their talents, and his repeatedly expressed approval of the industry they had both manifested. I believe he really did feel a considerable degree of pride in his beautiful and engaging children—yet what a vast, unimaginable difference there existed between his love and mine !

For more than a week everything went

on as smoothly as could have been expected. We had two or three little excursions into the country, where the children's keen enjoyment, and their intelligent observations on what they saw, appeared to please their father, and to atone to him for the absence of those more exciting amusements to which he had been so long accustomed.

There was only one thing that during this time gave me serious annoyance, and that was my husband's determined perseverance in talking of his new friend Mr. Leslie when Fanny was in the room. It was in vain that I remonstrated with him, assured him that it was most painful to our guest, and that no desirable end could be attained by it. He would only reply laughingly—"Nonsense, I shall help a friend if I can. You women know nothing of each other's hearts. Miss Fanny isn't going to be an old maid, I can tell you."

Although I did not attach the slightest importance to the hint contained in these last words, I took an opportunity, when

Fanny and myself happened to be alone, of speaking to her on the subject, and enquiring whether Edward had said anything to her about Mr. Leslie when I was not present.

“Only once,” she replied promptly, “and that was on the evening of his arrival, when you had gone up stairs with the children. I endeavoured to show Mr. Sinclair by my manner how unwelcome a subject he had chosen, and from that time he has only touched upon it openly, and in your hearing.”

“Well, dear Fanny, as I am quite unable to put a stop to it, and I am sure it must be exceedingly annoying to you, I have been thinking that this would be a good opportunity for you to pay a visit to Miss Sinclair. I could ill spare you when I am alone, and I daresay a little change will do you no harm.”

“Are you afraid for me?” she said, smilingly.

“No—but I feel that I have no right to see you exposed to so much annoyance.

Edward is perfectly incorrigible, and therefore I should really feel more comfortable if you were away."

"Then I will go—but may I not take one of the children with me?"

"Oh Fanny—I could not—"

"What, not for a week or two—aunty would be so delighted."

"Don't ask me, pray don't. I have never been separated from either of them a single day."

"Well, I will give it up then—but I am sure a change would do Willie good."

I reflected for a minute or two, pressing my hands upon my eyes as if to shut out everything that might influence my determination. At length I looked up again, and half ashamed of my weakness, said resolutely :

"No, it is no use. I *cannot* part from them voluntarily. A person sentenced to execution has no choice but to submit, but where will you find the individual strong enough to sign his own death-warrant?"

"Ah well," said Fanny, "you mothers are



privileged beings—but I shall miss those precious loves every minute of the day, and aunty will think I am looking sad for some other cause.”

Edward was not at all satisfied when he heard the arrangement we had made. He saw no reason why his being at home should drive Fanny away. Ashvale was not so lively a place that one of its inmates could easily be spared, he did not intend to remain much longer himself, and why could she not defer her visit to the old lady till he was gone !

I felt however so keenly my responsibility as regarded Fanny, that I would not allow her to yield, and in a few days after her absence was first suggested, she bade us a tearful farewell, hugging the little ones till they were in peril of suffocation, and set out for the residence of Miss Sinclair, within a mile or two of London.

I don't know why it was, but apart from the natural regret I must have felt at any time in being deprived of the companionship

of the friend who had been during the last year as a kind of second self to me, I experienced the moment Fanny had left the house a sudden depression of spirits that appeared more like the abrupt extinction of all personal happiness than a temporary sadness occasioned by a loss that was to be only for a brief period. It is true that Fanny was intimately associated with the only real happiness I had ever known, that her presence seemed to have brought sunshine to our home and preserved it there, but even this appeared to me insufficient to account for the deep gloom that overshadowed my mind, and communicated itself to those of my children on her departure from amongst us.

"Doesn't everything seem strange, mama?" said Willie, as we sat together in the evening, trying vainly to feel interested in our usual occupations. "I do so wish Miss Cleve hadn't gone away."

"I am so dull," added Mary, as she came and laid her pretty curly head upon my lap, "I can't work or read, or do anything."

“And poor mama is dull too,” replied Willie, quickly detecting the tear that started to my eye, as the children expressed the feelings against which I had been so hopelessly struggling myself. “Don’t be dull, there’s a darling mama, and I will get my hymn book and read to you. We will be so good, indeed we will while Miss Cleve is away ; only look happy again, sweet precious mama, and then I shan’t care for anything.”

Quick as a lightning flash the thought darted into my mind, “What real sorrow can I have while these precious ones are left to me?” and folding them to my heart, I silently blessed the Giver of all good, and entreated strength to battle against the causeless dejection that was so fiercely assailing me.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Now that Fanny was gone, and the first novelty of the children's society was over, my husband no longer sought to conceal his weariness of a country life, and his anxiety to return to the more attractive scenes amongst which he had made his home.

Day by day my hopes of impressing his mind with any serious thoughts, became feebler and slighter, till I had scarcely the heart to make an effort in a cause that appeared so desperate. He was not unkind to me, at least not systematically unkind, but there was often a sarcastic bitterness in his manner, a taunting insinuation that I was the occasion of our living apart, which exercised my patience not a little, and deprived me of the smallest satisfaction in his society.

But besides all this there were other symptoms about my husband which I did not like at all. It appeared evident to me that he was trying to wean the affections of the children, but particularly of Willie, from me, and to concentrate them upon himself. I had observed something of this kind when he was at Ashvale before, but then it had looked like a thoughtless impulse only, while now I fancied that it was beginning to assume the aspect of a settled design.

And did I fear that my own Willie, my tender, clinging, sensitive little boy, my blue eyed darling, whose every thought was whispered into his mother's ear, would really be persuaded by any artifice, to love another better than myself? Oh no, I knew far better than this, and yet I never saw him taken from me by his father, without experiencing an uneasiness that I should have found it difficult to explain.

Fanny had been gone, I think, about a week when one day, as I was finishing a long letter that I had been writing to her,

I asked the children who had suddenly come into the room, whether they had any particular message to send to their dear Miss Cleve.

"Please to tell her," said Mary, "that she must come back as soon as she can, we want her very much, and will you say too, mama, that the nuts are getting ripe, and that we don't intend having another pic-nic till she returns."

"And what from you, my Willie?" I asked, as I scribbled down Mary's message, and then waited for her brother to speak.

"Oh you can please tell her how glad I shall be to see her again, and that I am going out to-morrow for all the morning with papa."

The pen fell from my hand—"Going out with papa, what do you mean, Willie?"

"Oh, I thought you knew," he replied in astonishment, "because when papa spoke to me about it, and I enquired whether you wished it, he said, 'Oh, that's all right,' and seemed I fancied angry because I asked."

"Indeed I knew nothing about it. I

wanted to have taken you both with me to see the new nursery garden to-morrow. Do you know where your papa is going, Willie?"

"Not in the least. He only told me to be ready early, and that we should most likely be away all the morning."

"Very well, love, I will speak to papa about it. Run, both of you into the garden now, because I want to finish my letter."

Edward was out at the time this communication had been made to me, but he came in about an hour after, and although his countenance was not encouraging, I began asking him at once concerning the expedition Willie had spoken of.

"I wanted to take both the children out with me to-morrow," I said; "there is a new nursery garden opened a little beyond the village, and as some of the Grahams are going I was anxious to have accompanied them."

"You and Mary can go," he replied, shortly, "but I mean to have Willie for *my* companion."

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, to several places; I have some business to transact in the neighbourhood; but don't plague me with questions, just now. I am worried enough I can tell you."

"What is the matter, Edward? Has anything gone wrong with you?"

"No, but I have a splitting headache, there is an oppressiveness in this atmosphere that is killing me, I believe."

After a few minutes silence, I said, "Why cannot we all go out with you to-morrow morning? The children never like to be separated, and while you are transacting your business, they can walk about with me. Do let it be so, dear Edward," I continued, laying my hand on his arm, and speaking pleadingly, "you do not often invite me to be your companion now, and I know you will not remain at Ashvale much longer."

There was an expression in his face as he withdrew the arm on which my hand was lying that surprised and puzzled me. It



seemed to express something of impatience, something of shame, something of the half-forgotten tenderness of days gone by, and something struggling against all these of wilful resolution, the object or meaning of which was entirely hidden from me.

"Nonsense," he said at length, "don't make a goose of yourself, Ruth. We are old married people now, and have found out that our minds were not made to blend harmoniously. I am not particularly partial to the Darby and Joan style. You had much better take Mary to the gardens, as you originally intended, and leave Willie to me."

I thought this speech so very unkind that my voice trembled when I tried to answer it, and unwilling that Edward should see how deeply he had wounded me, I left the room, and avoided the subject during the remainder of the evening.

"Mama, dear," said Willie, when I was smoothing his pillow, and lingering, as I often did, to have a little quiet talk with him that night—"Mama, dear, if you are not

very tired, I wish you would sit and read to me for a bit. I don't feel in the least sleepy, and I do like so much to have you with me."

It was rarely that either of my children had to make a request to me in vain, and on the present occasion my own wishes coincided so entirely with those of the dear little pleader, that almost before his words were uttered I had agreed joyfully to do what he proposed.

"And now what shall we have first, my Willie? I have opened to the tenth of John. That is a favourite of yours—is it not, love?"

"Yes, mama. Please to read it, and to talk about it like you do sometimes, as you go on."

This chapter was associated in my mind with a scene from my own childhood. I never read it without recalling the evening before I left home for the first time, when my dear mother selected it as peculiarly appropriated to the occasion, and endeavoured to rouse my cold heart into a just apprecia-

tion of the blessings enjoyed by those who belong to the fold of Jesus. I fancied I could remember the very words she had used, and I tried to employ the same in dwelling on the chapter to Willie.

"You are not asleep, are you, my darling?" I asked suddenly, for the large blue eyes were half closed, and he looked quite still and deathlike.

"Oh no, mama. I do so love to have you here. I don't want to go to sleep for a long, long time. Let me hold your hand in mine. There, that is nice—and it is such a pretty chapter."

"You understand it, my Willie?"

"Yes, mama, I understand that Jesus watches over his own sheep at all times, and will never let any harm come to them. I am so glad that you belong to Him, mama."

"My precious—!"

"And I know I want to be one of His lambs too, mama. I can't always feel the same, but I think Jesus will help me if I ask Him."

"I am sure He will, my dearest. Think

for a moment of that great heart of love which for all that it has poured forth on mankind is still unexhausted, nay, still as full and rich in divine compassion, as it was on the first utterance of those unspeakably precious words: 'Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O God.'

"Those who know they have such a Saviour need not mind any earthly sufferings—need they, mama?"

"They ought not to do so, darling, but we cannot expect to be entirely delivered from sin and weakness while in the flesh—besides, God often sends afflictions to purify us, and fit us for our heavenly home."

"What do you think you should feel the most, mama, of any trial that could happen to you?"

"Ah, my Willie, you do not need that I should tell you this. There is one trial which I never dare even to think about, but I would hope that my weak faith may be spared too hard a conflict, and I fear this

would be indeed too hard for it. See how foolish I am—my hand is trembling, and my heart beating quickly at the very idea your question suggested. Let me remember that God is love.”

“Aunt Katherine used to tell us, mama, that God is love as well when he causes sorrow as when he causes joy. Don’t you believe this too?”

“Yes, my dearest,” I replied, wondering what train of thought could have led to this observation, “because he causes sorrow to draw his people nearer to Himself, therefore it must be love, and love of the purest and wisest kind.”

“I am glad you think this, mama, because if any great grief should ever come to you, you will not give up believing that God is love, you will know and feel that He is only meaning to draw your heart nearer to Jesus.”

I was so struck by this pointed application, and so unaccountably saddened by my dear boy’s unusual manner, that it was several minutes ere I was able to reply. I

said at length, as I stooped fondly over him and kissed the meek pale face that was gazing so lovingly into my own,—

“I will think of your words, darling, if my faith is ever very severely tried, but should I seem to lose my confidence or my hope, will not my little boy be his mother’s faithful monitor, and remind her, even when the wild waves are threatening to overwhelm her, that—God is Love !”

He raised himself slightly on the pillow, and fixing his pure eyes steadfastly on mine, said, in a low voice,—

“But if I were not with you, dear mama ?”

“My precious ! what do you mean ?” I cried in suddenly awakened alarm, though he had spoken with the utmost quietness ; “you are not ill, my Willie—you have no fear that ——”

I could not finish the sentence for tears were choking my utterance, and taking a firmer grasp of the hand he had been holding, Willie said hastily,—

“ I am quite well, indeed, mama, and I did not mean to make you cry. Poor mama, darling mama, you shall not stay talking to me any longer. I will go to sleep, and you shall go down to papa—indeed, indeed, I am quite well. I only meant that we might not be all our lives together.”

Although only half re-assured by his eager assertions, I felt that I should do him harm by remaining with him while in a state of so much excitement, and as my nerves had been completely unstrung, I knew that nothing less than an hour's solitude would restore them to their original tone.

“ I will leave you then, my Willie, for the present, but if you cannot sleep you must ring the bell, and I will come to you again by and bye.”

“ Oh, I shall be sure to sleep now, mama. Thank you for staying so long with me. One more nice kiss—and now run away, little mama. I shan't have another word to say to you.”

I was not sorry to find that Edward had

gone out for a walk, as I had never felt less indisposed for indifferent conversation. I sat alone, therefore, till my own bed time arrived, and then, in passing the nursery, went in to take one more peep at my darling Willie.

He was asleep now, and as I stood for a minute or two to gaze at him (shading the lamp with my hand), I thought it would be impossible for any human artist to conceive so exquisite and perfect a representation of childish loveliness and purity. I dared not continue looking at him—perhaps some mother may understand the feeling—it seemed as if with every glance I took a new link of love was forged, and as if the chain thus rapidly lengthening was coiling round every avenue and inlet to my heart, and keeping out all besides—*threatening to keep out God Himself!*

Was it alone to the Christians who lived eighteen hundred years ago that the loving and beloved disciple addressed his solemn words of warning? No—he knew what



would be in men's hearts and in women's hearts while the world continued, and it was for the Christians of all ages, for the men and women of the present day as well as for those of the past, that John wound up his earnest epistle with the injunction, dictated by his knowledge of human frailty : " Little children, keep yourselves from idols !"

## CHAPTER IX.

I WAS up and dressed long before Edward was awake on the following morning, and after reading for half an hour I went out of my room, intending to take a quiet walk in the orchard before I called the children.

To my surprise, however, I found them both there with nurse already, and the latter explained that master Willie had been awake so early that she thought she might as well get up Miss Mary too, and let them have a taste of the beautiful morning air.

“Quite right, nurse,” I said; “but what is the matter with Willie? why couldn’t he sleep?”

“He says he is very well, ma’am, and I don’t see that there looks much the matter with him.”

"Oh, I never was better, indeed, mama. You shall say so too, when I have had my kiss, for I am going to run a race with Mary, and if I win she is to bring me home a plant from the nursery garden. Now then, Mary, I am quite ready; the walnut tree is where we are to stop. One, two, three — off we go!"

And off they did go, like fleet-footed little deer, their joyous voices mingling pleasantly with those of the birds above them, and their light flying figures showing gracefully against the dark twisted trees they passed so rapidly.

"God bless them both!" said nurse, in her grave quiet tone, as she walked on slowly beside me, "and keep them for many years as happy and as innocent as they are at present."

"For the happiness, nurse," I replied, "we must trust our Father's love—for the innocence we must implore His grace."

"And I don't fear but what He'll give it, and *has* given it," she said, decidedly;

“there’s something about those dear lambs, particularly about Master Willie, that isn’t like other children. He’ll be a pride and a blessing to you, ma’am, one of these days, or I’m much mistaken.”

“Ah, nurse, don’t you think he is a pride and a blessing to me now?”

“Yes, ma’am, but I mean in a different manner. You love him now because he is your son, and because he has a thousand pretty ways that sink down into the heart and stir up all its warmest feelings, but you’ll love him by and bye for his devotion to the Master you serve yourself, and because you’ll see that Master’s image reflected in him.”

I was greatly struck by this idea. It gave me some new thoughts to dwell upon, and I did not speak again until the children came running back to us, proclaiming that Willie had won the race, and that Mary was to choose the prettiest flower in the new nursery garden to reward him for his achievement.

"But I did not intend to go without you, my Willie," I said. "If papa will not give you up we can wait till another day."

"Oh, do go, mama," he replied quite earnestly; "it would amuse Mary, and she would not know what to do with herself all the morning at home."

"Well, we will see about it by and bye. I think we had better come in and get some breakfast now—your race must have made you both hungry."

Willie linked his hand in mine as we walked towards the house, and though we neither of us spoke a dozen words, I felt several times the fond pressure of the dear little fingers which said, plainer than any language could have said it, "How I love you, mama!"

I noticed, the moment my husband made his appearance at the breakfast table, that he was in an unusually bad temper, and I therefore came at once to the conclusion that it would be quite useless asking him to relinquish Willie, as the slightest opposition,

when he was in an angry mood, always increased his irritability, and made matters infinitely worse than they had been before.

"I hope the boy won't keep me waiting," were the first words he addressed to me, as I handed him a cup of coffee; "have you told nurse to have him dressed directly after breakfast?"

"No—but he knows that you want him early, and he is sure to be ready in time."

There was no answer to this, but I observed that Edward was swallowing his coffee almost in a boiling state, and that he did not eat anything at all.

"I fear you are not well," I said at length, "is there nothing on the table that you can eat? Fasting is but a bad preparation for a long walk."

He looked up quickly, and again there appeared on his face an expression that both puzzled and distressed me; but instead of replying to my words, he said abruptly—

"When do you expect Fanny back! It was a stupid thing to send her away."

"I daresay she will return in about another week," I replied, "but as this has been her first holiday, I have been unwilling to urge her to shorten it on my account. We shall all be delighted however to see her amongst us again."

As he did not take any notice of this or of me, I presently cut a slice of ham and laid it, with a roll, on his plate. "Do try to eat a little, Edward," I said, "you will be quite faint by and bye."

"I can't eat, Ruth—I've got that splitting headache again. You had better go and see that the boy makes a good breakfast, and tell him to look sharp, as I shall be ready in ten minutes from this time."

I rose immediately and left the room, feeling that if I stayed a moment longer, I should make a goose of myself. It now appeared evident to me that Edward had something on his mind, and notwithstanding the reserve he seemed resolved to practise towards me, all the old emotions of sympathy and affection were immediately awakened on

his behalf, and I longed, but had not the courage to tell him, how dear he still was to me, and how ready I was to share his sorrow whatever might be its nature.

I now thought as I went towards the children's room, that I had been exceedingly selfish in wishing to deprive my husband of his son's society, and I felt glad to know that my Willie's cheerful prattling would help to divert his father's melancholy or distressing thoughts, for this one morning at least.

"You must make haste and get ready, my darling," I said as I entered their room, "for papa is in a great hurry, and will not like to be kept waiting. Here is a little bag of biscuits for you to put in your pocket, Willie, in case either papa or yourself should be hungry on the road."

"Dear mama, you never forget anything—and you *will* go to the garden with Mary, won't you?"

"Yes, love, if Mary wishes it. I hope we shall all be back to dinner."



Willie seemed to be very busy, though I do not know what he had to do, and bidding him come to the breakfast room as soon as he was ready, I went back to my husband, and found him putting on his hat and gloves in the hall.

"I suppose you cannot tell at what hour we may expect you," I said timidly, for his countenance was like a thunder-cloud again.

"I can tell you nothing," was the abrupt reply—"don't wait dinner for us—there are plenty of inns on the road."

"But you won't let Willie walk too far, will you? I really don't think the child is very well."

"Nonsense! you make a fool of him—he's as well and strong as I am; but let him have the pony if you like it better."

"How far, then, are you going?"

"Can't say—it depends on circumstances; order the pony at once, and then you'll be satisfied."

This caused a delay of another ten minutes, but at length all was ready, and my darling

Willie, dressed in his little riding coat, came running in to say good bye to me.

“Take care of papa and amuse him as well as you are able,” I whispered, as the dear child clung round me, and seemed, I fancied, unwilling to go away—“you will have a lovely ride, my dearest, and we will bring you the prettiest flower we can find—Willie, Willie, my boy, my precious, what is it?”

For a tear which I knew *my* eyes had not shed was moistening my face, and I felt at the same time the rapid beatings of a little heart beneath my hand.

“What is it, Willie, speak to me—you are ill, my beloved?”

“No, no, no! my own mama—indeed, I am quite well. You will believe your little boy, won’t you, mama? kiss me once more. Oh, there is papa calling; take care of Mary, and now good bye, good bye.”

He was gone before I could utter another word, and the next minute I heard the tramping of the pony’s feet upon the gravelled path, and had only time, as I ran to

the window, to see the father and son passing through the gates which closed immediately, and hid them entirely from my view.

Half an hour later Mary found me still standing by the same window, and, guessing nothing of the gloom that had fallen over me, asked whether she might not get ready to go to the gardens.

"Do as you like, dear," I said absently, "I daresay Mrs. Graham will take you."

"Oh, mama, but you are going too—you promised Willie that you would."

At that magical name my wandering senses returned to me, and drawing my little girl to my arms, I told her I would keep the promise, and that she might go and ask Mrs. Graham when it would be time to get ready.

In the open air, and walking briskly along the pretty road that led to the gardens, my spirits greatly revived, and I was able to converse cheerfully with Mrs. Graham, to feel interested in all she told me concerning the happiness of my old friend Bessie, and

to listen occasionally to my Mary's prattling about the flower she had to choose for Willie.

We stayed more than an hour at the gardens, and then having selected a couple of the finest dwarf roses that were to be obtained, we set off again on our road homeward, hoping to find the travellers arrived before us.

It was not so, however, and though I did my best to amuse Mary, and atone to her for her brother's absence, I soon perceived that this would be no easy task, as she had never accustomed herself to have a thought or a wish, or the most trifling pleasure, apart from Willie.

We waited dinner till three o'clock, and then sent away our own almost untasted. The afternoon threatened to be wet, and I feared Willie would take cold and be quite worn out before they could reach home. "It was so tiresome of papa," Mary said, "because he knew how delicate Willie was, and how uneasy we should be about him."

Towards five o'clock I became uneasy indeed, and then for the first time, I noticed that

nurse kept coming in and out of the room on some pretence or other, and that she looked as if there was something she wanted, but scarcely liked to say.

Thinking that Mary might be a restraint, I at length sent her to practise the piano in an adjoining apartment, and then entreated the old woman to tell me whether she knew anything of which I ought to be informed.

"That's just what I've been in doubt about, ma'am," she replied in a tone that struck me as being singularly tremulous, "however you shall hear it now, for I can't have a minute's peace while I keep it to myself."

Being literally incapable of speaking a word for the wild throbbing of my heart, nurse began her story at once.

"Well, ma'am, I am afraid there's something not quite right going on. I didn't think much of it till within the last hour, but you must try to be calm, my dear lady, and to look up to Him who has the ordering of all our concerns, and then I'll tell you more about it."

Outwardly, I believe, the chiselled marble on a monument could not have presented a calmer or a stonier aspect than I did, and my good nurse, unskilled in the symptoms which denote intensity of feeling, continued in a somewhat firmer voice.

"I told you, ma'am, this morning, that Master Willie was awake very early. The moment I woke up myself I saw those large blue eyes of his wide open and turned to look at the trees that were blowing backwards and forwards by the window. I thought there was something strange about the child's face, and getting up quickly I went to his bedside, and asked him if anything was the matter. 'Nothing, dear nurse,' he said in his pretty way, 'what makes you think so?' 'Because you look different to what you generally do, Master Willie,' I replied, 'and it's my belief there is something the matter.' With that, ma'am, the tears start to his eyes, and he pulls me down to him and whispers softly, 'Dear nurse, don't tell anybody for the world, because perhaps it's all fancy, but

I think papa means to take me away to school to-day, and not to let poor mama know anything about it.' I was so struck, ma'am, by these words that I could not make him an answer for a minute or two ; at last, however, I told him how unlikely it was, for, indeed, I thought so at the time, and that he had best put such fancies out of his head and go to sleep again. 'I can't sleep, nurse,' he said, 'for thinking of poor mama. I don't mind for myself whatever they do to me, but oh, I know she will be so unhappy, she will grieve day and night about me, and this thought breaks my heart, nurse—only this, indeed, because I know that I must expect trouble like other people, and I am not afraid but what Jesus will be my Friend, and then I need not mind any body?' 'You are a sweet lamb,' I said ; but then I began to cry, ma'am, as indeed who could have helped it—and Master Willie put his little arms about my neck, and kissed me, and began to speak of the holidays, and to say all he could to comfort

me, and he made me promise again and again not to mention a word of what had passed to you, as of course it was only his own idea after all, and he said, besides, that if his papa had really determined to send him to school, it would be certain to be done some day. When I had time to think the matter over to myself, it seemed to me the strangest and the least likely thing in the world, and it was only about an hour ago when Jane told me that master's portmanteau had disappeared from his dressing room, that I began to look upon it in a serious light. I hope, ma'am, you'll forgive me for not telling you before, and that if this great trouble is to come upon you—oh, my dear, dear lady, you are not going to faint away—bear up, ma'am, pray do, for the sake of Miss Mary and all. The holidays will soon be here."

I could not describe, were I to hold my pen in my hand from now till the day of doom, one half of the feelings that swept, torrent-like, over my mind during the above recital. But assuredly until nurse mentioned



the fact of my husband's portmanteau having disappeared, a determined incredulity of what my Willie feared, predominated, and allowed me to maintain that outward composure which deceived the narrator as to the impression the real fact was calculated to produce.

As soon as my mind accepted the great probability of the case, a fierce internal warfare was begun, but even this had at present no further evidence than the death-like pallor which nurse remarked, and which gave rise to her apprehensions of a fainting fit.

"I don't think I shall faint, nurse," I said in a voice that sounded unfamiliar even to my own ears; "you have startled me very much, and I want to be alone for a little while to think over the matter calmly."

"But, my dear lady, are you fit to be alone?"

"Quite fit, thank you, nurse. I will ring if I want anybody."

She went out reluctantly, and in the momentary relief I experienced in being

alone it seemed to me quite possible to think the matter calmly over, as I had so quietly proposed doing. Alas ! I soon discovered that my mind had received a shock, and that it was quite incapable of connecting half a dozen distinct ideas. I pressed my hand despairingly to my head, and sat gazing into the fire that had been kindled in anticipation of my Willie's return. The rain was now beating fiercely against the windows, and the autumn wind sighing mournfully round the house. In the midst of all I could hear only my child's voice imploring to be brought back to the mother whose heart was breaking for him.

At length the door opened softly, and Mary, with her arms full of something my eyes were too dim to distinguish, came into the room.

"Mama, isn't this dreadful weather for poor Willie? I hope you will scold papa when he comes in. See, I have brought Willie's coat and slippers to warm by the fire, and we must have some nice tea ready

for him. I wish it didn't rain so, that I might run down the lane to watch for their coming."

I could only look round at her and say in a choked voice, "Don't, don't, Mary dear," and with an instinctive consciousness of something wrong, the child knelt down on the hearth rug at my side, and gathering my yielding hands into her own kissed them silently, and waited for me to explain what had happened.

But I could not speak. I could not tell her that the brother she waited for so anxiously was taken far away, and that the father I had taught her to love and honour had cruelly deceived us all, and proved himself deficient in even the commonest humanity. No, I would not make my innocent child participate in the dark unhallowed feelings that raged in my own heart, nor could my lips frame words of falsehood, and utter smooth things concerning him who had brought this trial upon me.

"Mama, dear, dear mama, you look so

ill," came at length, in the tenderest accents, from the kneeling figure beside me; and then I stroked the sunny curls, and kissed the white brow, and fondled the little hands that were still clinging to my own—but I could do nothing more.

And now the door opened again, and nurse's voice, in sorrowful and anxious tones, broke upon my ear. "Miss Mary, love, I wish you would go and set out the tea things in the small parlour for you and me. I shall be coming in presently, but I want just now to say a word to mama."

Without a question, the dear child instantly obeyed, and then nurse, seeing that I was to all appearance as calm as before, put a letter into my hands, and walked to the window while I read it.

"Who brought it—what is it?" I said eagerly, being quite unable in the bewilderment that had come over me to recognize the writing.

"A boy from the village, ma'am," was the reply. "He said a gentleman had left

it early in the morning, with the orders that it was not to be delivered till this hour."

I put up an imploring prayer for sufficient clearness of brain to understand the letter, and then, with desperate courage, and with burning, tearless eyes, I opened it, and read the following :—

" My dear Ruth,

" My excuse for what I am about to do is, in the first place, that I have an intense horror of scenes and fainting fits, and in the second place that I cannot help regarding you (though a sensible woman in many respects) as perfectly insane on the subject of your children's education. I have therefore determined after much consideration, and *by the urgent advice of several of my best friends*, to take the boy from you for a few years, during which he will have the advantage of a rational education, and be as well taken care of, I promise you, as he could be at home. I trust, my dear Ruth, that your good sense will enable you

to rejoice (after the first natural regret of a week or two) at the decided step I have taken, but in any case pray do not worry yourself, and risk your health by leaving home in search of Willie; for I tell you candidly you will have no chance of finding him, and even should you do so, I have resolved not to return him to your care till his education is completed. For myself, I am going to my old quarters again for the winter, therefore you had better have your friend Miss Cleve back as soon as you can; and I sincerely trust you will console yourself with our pretty Mary, and keep up your spirits till we meet again.

“Ever your affectionate husband,

“EDWARD SINCLAIR.”

I had read it all, every word, twice over, three times over, and yet I could not make my mind rest steadily on the one great and crushing fact it communicated. I can remember looking fixedly and intently at the signature, when for the third time it came

beneath my notice, and having my confused and excited thoughts carried back as it seemed by some mysterious association to the far off period when this "Edward Sinclair" was my devoted lover, when his very name, the name so clearly written there, sent a thrill of rapture to my heart, and brought a cloud of sunny visions before the eye that saw so falsely into the unknown future.

How long my distracted mind vibrated between the past and the present, in its efforts to comprehend the vastness of the trial that it had to encounter, I cannot tell. I remember a sensation of coldness round the heart, and a desire which I failed to carry out of making nurse understand that I was ill.

And after this all was darkness.

## CHAPTER X.

WE learn from the history of Job, that the first impulse of a perfected Christian character on the arrival of sudden affliction is, not only to pray, but to praise. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Alas! how very far was I from this attainment. And yet, I had thought myself strong in faith, and capable of enduring all things for the sake of Him who had loved me, and washed me from my sins in His own blood. I *had* thought so; but now He shewed me my weakness, now I was made to feel how little progress I had made in vital godliness, how little severing of the heart from earthly idols there had been, how complete an absence of that spirit which



could lead in the midst of the keenest woe, to the declaration, "It is well."

Could it be well with me when I was parted from my Willie, when that voice of sweetest music fell no longer on my ear, when those eyes of love and tenderness were no longer lifted to my face, and when the little arms, dearer to me than all the empires of the world, stole no longer round my neck with their fond and earnest clasp?

Could it be well with me when the delicate and fragile flower I had warmed for ten long years against my heart, was torn rudely from its home, and transplanted into some cold and foreign soil, where no eyes and hands of affection would henceforth watch and tend it?

Could it be well with me, when I reflected that the man I had chosen to pass my life with, had done all this, and that he had the power, a most cruel and inhuman power, to separate me for ever from my child, if such were his sovereign will and pleasure?

Could it indeed be well?

An impatient throb of agony was the only answer my crushed heart could give for many dark and troubled days to this question ; but when reason became somewhat clearer, they brought me a letter from my Willie (one that he had left with nurse to give me in case his fears were verified), and from these few and hastily scribbled lines I was taught another answer. Thus my darling wrote :—

“ My own dear, sweet Mama,

“ When you read this, I shall be, perhaps, very far away from you, and from Mary, and from all I most love, and you, ah mama this makes me *so* unhappy, you will be fretting about your little boy, and thinking that you will never see him again, and a great many other things that will make you pale and sad, like you used to be when poor grandmama died, and before aunt Katherine came to us. Oh mama ! if you only knew how I love you, but I did not mean to write about *my* love, you are in no danger of forgetting or disbelieving that, are you, my sweet mama ? I meant to write about the

love of God, and to remind you of what you told me yourself last night, that He is no less a God of love when he causes sorrow, than when He causes joy; and that He takes away what we best love, to draw our hearts to Jesus. Now, mama, if you love your own Willie, try to remember this; and then you will smile and look happy again, and comfort my poor Mary, who will not be able to see as you can, that this sorrow is sent to us by a kind Father, and only to make us better and happier in the end. Mama, I will try to be a good boy, and to learn everything they tell me; and above all, I will try to think of everything that you and my dear Miss Cleve have taught me. I have no time to say more, and I have not said half that is in my heart. Dear mama, precious mama, take comfort; and never, never forget that 'God is Love!'

"Your own, own fond little Willie."

And how was it with me after I had received this sweet, sweet message from my lost child, my own, own fond little Willie?

Did I take comfort, did I raise once more my drooping head, did I hush the wild impatient murmurings of my rebellious heart, and acknowledge that God is Love?

Not yet: but through the mists and vapours that still hung about my mind, I saw that I ought to do so, and I was able to utter a feeble note of thanksgiving to the pitying God and Father who had made my beloved child the medium of conveying to me so gentle a rebuke for my angry murmurings against the dispensations of an All-righteous Providence.

But, oh the anguish of that time, the days and nights of ceaseless sorrow, a sorrow that looked not around me for objects to feel and strengthen it, but that had my Willie, and my Willie alone, for its beginning and continuance—End, alas! it had none.

I pictured him, exposed to every variety and form of suffering that tender childhood can endure, and live. From early morning, till the close of day, I followed him through the strange scenes in which I supposed him

placed. His lonely waking, and vain yearning for the sweet sister's voice, the fond mother's caress. His long, dreary days of uninteresting study, without word or look of love to urge him on; his restless nights of feverish tossings, and silent, unpitied tears, all, all pursued me with relentless cruelty, and never changed but to assume a more terrible and appalling aspect than before.

And during these first days of overwhelming suffering, I could not endure the sight of my gentle patient Mary. Dear as she had ever been to me, she was not Willie; and the very sound of her voice became, from the associations connected with it, an anguish too great to bear. In my utterly selfish grief I forgot that mine was not the only heart this grief had caused to bleed; and I yielded far too easily to the mental lethargy that day by day, and hour by hour, was permitted to creep upon me.

The last distinct recollection I have of this period, is connected with my poor little girl, whose claims on my sympathy and tender-



ness I had so blindly overlooked, in the engrossing nature of my individual sorrow.

I had never gone down stairs since the evening I was carried senseless to my bed, after the receipt of my husband's letter. I thought the sight of a single familiar object, recalling past days of happiness, would break my heart, or deprive me of the little reason that was still left to me. I therefore sat all day in my own darkened room, seeing nobody except nurse, whose devotion to me was unwearied; and doing nothing but weep over the few precious farewell lines my angel boy had written.

But this could not last; and a numbing of all the sensations of feeling was rapidly coming on, giving those around me the idea of approaching insanity, and seeming to me like the gentle, quiet footsteps of a death I was too weak either to wish for, or to dread.

One evening, while I was in this state, Mrs. Graham sent to say she wanted particularly to see me; and although I had several times firmly denied her admittance,

I yielded on the present occasion, without knowing why I did so, and half unconscious, I believe, of what I had done.

Of all that my kind neighbour said to me, during a very long visit, I remember nothing but the expression of her regret that I did not send Mary away, or rouse myself to pay her more attention. "For the poor child," said Mrs. Graham, "is evidently pining, and, unless something is done, I shall fear most serious consequences."

"Let Mary come to me to-night, nurse," I said, when my visitor had gone, "and give me paper and pens, that I may write to Miss Cleve immediately."

"We wrote to her, ma'am, several days ago," was the reply, "and as no answer has come, we expect her every minute."

"Very well, nurse. She will manage everything by and bye. My head is feeling worse than usual to-night; but don't forget to let Mary come to me."

"I am afraid it will be too much for you, ma'am," said the kind old woman, with tears

raining down her cheeks; "Miss Mary is looking but sadly."

I don't remember what I replied to this, if indeed I replied at all; but I have a distinct recollection of seeing my poor neglected little Mary come timidly into the room, just as it was getting dark, and of being painfully struck with the changed tones of her voice, as she threw herself into my outstretched arms, and cried, "oh, mama, mama!" as if imploring me to yield her at length that sympathy which the tender loving heart so sorely needed.

There were few words spoken after this, but I held my child in my arms while I had strength to do so; and when rapidly increasing illness obliged me to lie down in bed, they laid my Mary beside me, and the last words that fell upon my ear that night were those of a broken, though most earnest prayer, in which my name and Willie's were mingled with the strong crying and tears of her who thus touchingly expressed her deep love for us both.



A fever on the brain—the natural consequence of the excitement I had undergone—came on before the morning, and for days and weeks my anguish was expressed only in the incoherent ravings of delirium, which brought me to the very brink of the grave, and preached to those around me the exceeding sin and the folly of making human idols.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE impression on my mind was that of awaking from a long and heavy sleep, when, one evening, I suddenly unclosed my eyes, and endeavoured to make out where I was, and who were the persons I saw moving stealthily and noiselessly as shadows, around me.

There was still a weight on my brain, but it did not forbid the action of thought or memory, and in a few minutes I had recalled sufficient of the past to wish my eyes had never more unclosed, and discovered that the individuals in my room were aunt Katherine, nurse, and Mrs. Graham.

With as much strength as I could com-

mand (and that did not permit me to speak above a whisper), I named the former, and then signed for her to come nearer to the bed. Before obeying me she turned and shook hands with Mrs. Graham, (who immediately left the room) and whispered something to nurse, who, after a wistful glance at me, took her departure also.

Then Miss Sinclair came towards the bed, and with a face so cold and grave, that I had at once an instinctive consciousness of having fallen under her displeasure, asked me how I felt, and how long I had been awake before I spoke to her.

As well as I could, I replied to these inquiries, signifying at their conclusion that I had also some questions I desired to ask of her; but seeing the state of absolute weakness I was in, she peremptorily forbade my speaking another word, and quieted me by the assurance that she would tell me all it was requisite for me to know.

First of all though, I must swallow a draught of most bitter medicine. "I am

sorry for you," said aunt Katherine, as she held the glass to my shrinking lips, "but whatever our case requires, even if it is worm-wood and gall, a wise physician will prescribe for us—neither will our fretting or wincing under it take away the least particle of its bitterness. Nothing will do that but accepting it thankfully, and with the fullest persuasion that it is given us for our good."

Oh yes, dear aunt Katherine, I should have understood you without the look that accompanied these words, and which nevertheless expedited the disappearance of the medicine she was offering to me, and caused me to lie back quietly on my pillow and wait till it was her pleasure to speak again. At length she began.

"I will imagine the questions you wish to propose, and answer them in the order they occur to me. In the first place, then, you have been suffering from a brain fever during the last three weeks. Your life was several times despaired of, and even now your ultimate recovery must depend, humanly speak-

ing, on your own strength of mind and willingness to bear the measure of affliction that has been allotted to you. In the second place, we have made every effort in our power to gain tidings of your husband and child, but without success. Letters sent to Edward's former residence in Paris have been returned with the words "not here," attached to them. Advertisements in the public journals have been equally unsuccessful, and we have at length arrived at the conclusion that wherever your husband may have placed the child (and that, doubtless, is not in England), he himself must have extended his travels much further than he has been in the habit of doing. In the third place, your little girl has been ill, and I have sent her to the sea-side with Fanny until your complete recovery enables you to devote proper attention to her yourself. And in the last place, I am here, having left all my numerous duties at home to assist you in throwing off a dejection which, under any and every possible circumstance of human trial, is dis-

honouring the Christian character, and calculated to do serious injury to our Master's cause."


I believe aunt Katherine felt as deep and true a sympathy for my distress as one human heart could feel for the woe of another, but her manner indicated little more than a determined disapproval of that unrestrained indulgence in sorrow, which had brought me to my present state. She knew it was necessary that I should be reminded against whom I was rebelling, and in the performance of the painful duty that had devolved upon her, she allowed no natural feelings of pity or tenderness to interfere. In answer to all she now told me, I only hid my face in my hands, and murmured despairingly—"Oh, my Willie, my Willie!"

This did not please aunt Katherine at all. She wanted the manifestation of a different spirit; she expected better things of one who had a Friend in heaven, and who was privileged to trust in that love which knows no change and can never err. She stood

still for a few minutes, and then quietly withdrawing my hands from my face, asked me, almost sternly, whether I thought myself a better or a safer guardian for my child than God.

“I don’t want you to speak,” she continued in her firm, stedfast voice, “but I want you to think of this question, and if you cannot find a satisfactory answer to it, ask God to help you to one. I shall not say another word to you to-night, so you will have abundance of time for reflection. If you want anything I shall be at hand to wait upon you. Here is lemonade when you are thirsty—your face is looking greatly flushed just now.”

It is perfectly astonishing what vast power one human mind may, under particular circumstances, exercise over another. Had any body asked me before my illness whether Miss Sinclair, or a hundred Miss Sinclairs, could have stilled the wild storm that was raging in my breast, I should undoubtedly have repudiated the idea with indignation;



but now, almost at her first words, and these not words of gentleness, I was conscious of a degree of quietude that I could scarcely understand.

I had certainly never failed throughout my great affliction to recognize as an abstract truth that principle which my Willie had so touchingly insisted on in his last sweet letter to me, namely, that "God is Love," no less when He causes sorrow, than when he causes joy. I had, I repeat, recognized and acknowledged this as an abstract truth, but I had never, till aunt Katherine put the question to me above recorded, been able to bring it down and fold it to my own heart, as a consolation that I was justified in appropriating.

"Do you believe," she had said, "that you would have been a better or a safer guardian for your child than God?"

They were simple words, and words that may appear to some, wholly inadequate to produce the quieting effect described. Neither can I explain how it was that they had this



effect on me. I know only that my wearied mind rested on them with a strange sense of relief from the former anguish, and that I was inclined once more to look upon aunt Katherine as the good angel, sent to snatch me from the waters of destruction.

That night my repose was calm and undisturbed, and when my eyes opened on the misty light of a winter's morning, I could hush the first impulse of sinful murmuring, by remembering those refreshing words (which on one occasion of my life had been suggested only to heighten my agony), "Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

It was now that I began to recall with heartfelt gratitude those evidences of grace in my beloved Willie, which encouraged me to hope that he was indeed numbered amongst the lambs of Jesus, and as such, entitled to every privilege enjoyed by the Israel of God.

"Well," said Miss Sinclair, coming to me about an hour after my first waking, "have

you found a satisfactory answer to my question, yet? You are looking considerably better than you did last night."

"I *am* better, much better," I replied, holding out the hand which was instantly taken by my faithful friend—"you must have a little patience with me, and I will try ——."

But the sentence remained unfinished, and aunt Katherine, averting her own face (how I loved her for that little token!) sat down on a chair by the bed-side, and held my hand while that passionate, but not wilful, fit of weeping lasted.

From this time we got on exceedingly well together, and during all the slow and protracted period of my recovery, I experienced nothing but the most watchful attention and patient kindness from dear aunt Katherine. It is true that she allowed no indulgence in sentimental grief of any kind, no fond recurrences to the past, no sighing over the days that were gone for ever; but then I knew that in her heart she sympathized

with the very least of my regrets, and I could see, when reason was unfettered, the wisdom of the discipline to which she subjected me.

One great trial that pressed upon me now was the non-arrival of the promised letters from my Willie. I thought if I could only be assured that he was well and not unhappy, I might learn to bear my own part of the burden without any vivid manifestations of discontent or hopelessness ; but the continued uncertainty in which his fate was involved, tried my fortitude to the utmost, and would have been too much for me had not aunt Katherine stood by, and with her calm, undaunted courage, held me from sinking.

Sometimes there was a struggle for mastery between us, but the weak had, of course, on all such occasions to yield to the strong, and well was it for me that the necessity existed.

I had been pronounced in a state of convalescence by my physician many days before it was proposed for me to venture down stairs. Aunt Katherine knew how I

dreaded the change, and she was willing to indulge me to the extent of what she believed right and expedient. But one mild morning, about a week before Christmas, Miss Sinclair came into my room while nurse was dressing me, and said that she intended to have me down that day to dinner.

"Indeed you must excuse me," I said resolutely—"I am not near strong enough to leave my room at present."

"We will see about that," was the quiet reply—"Nurse, I will finish dressing your mistress, while you take her shawl and pillows to the front drawing-room."

"Oh, Miss Sinclair!" I began, the moment we were alone, "if you only knew how I dread going down stairs, I am sure you would not ask me to do so yet—only wait till after Christmas."

"It would be just the same, then. What can be more childish than standing with chattering teeth to look upon the water, when a cold bath is before us. The first plunge over, we cease to feel that we have anything

dreadful to endure. Come, make haste ; I have a splendid fire waiting for you."

" If Mary were at home, I think I could bear it better—but this utter desolation——."

" Will lead you, I sincerely trust, to find all your happiness and comfort in Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ! I always foresaw some such trials as these, as the natural result of your inordinate attachment to your children."

As I was now quite dressed, aunt Katherine drew my arm within her own, and regardless of the tears that were pouring down my face, led me slowly and with much tenderness of manner to the room she had prepared for my reception.

She did not know, she could not know, the sharp agony this compliance with her wishes cost me, but my countenance must have expressed something of it, and have led to the more than usual devotion which throughout the whole day my kind companion manifested towards me.

In the evening, after Miss Sinclair had

been reading to me for a considerable time, she laid aside her book abruptly, and asked me whether I did not feel better for the effort she had obliged me to make.

"I have got over it pretty well," I replied, "but there is an aching at my heart to-night, a yearning for my children's voices that you would scarcely approve. What am I to do, Miss Sinclair, how can I quiet this restless fever of the mind?"

"By remembering both the source and object of your affliction. God puts His people into the furnace to purify them, nor takes them thence until like the refiner of silver watching the precious metal, He sees his own image reflected in them. Should not this thought quiet the Christian under the severest suffering? What can we desire more, what ought we to desire less, than to be transformed into the likeness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?"

"But it is so difficult to realize the idea that God is the author of afflictions which come to us through the medium of our fellow men,

especially through their baseness or unkindness. If we lose a friend by death, we recognize at once the hand of an Almighty Power, but if we are deprived of that friend through treachery or any other merely human agency, it seems altogether a different thing."

"The Sabeans took away the oxen and the asses of Job, and the Chaldeans carried off his camels, yet he appears to have been well assured in his own mind when he said — '*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away*, blessed be the name of the Lord!'"

"Job was amply recompensed in the end for all his sufferings."

"Yes, but then Job justified God in all His mysterious dealings with him. Let the children of this world murmur and rebel against the dispensation of the Sovereign Will to which they profess no allegiance; but let the redeemed of the Lord acknowledge with songs of rejoicing their fealty to Him, and 'be still' though all his arrows are falling thickly around them."

"I try to be patient, indeed I do; but I fear I am a very slow learner."

"I fear so too, but we have this for our consolation—that God is a very skilful Teacher, and what He takes in hand He will assuredly finish."

"Ah, but I may require a still hotter furnace—and how am I to endure it?"

"Ask Him who has said, 'When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the floods, they shall not overflow thee.'"

"The last year was such a very, very happy one, that the contrast is the more appalling."

"Be thankful for the happiness, and remember how little you deserved it."

"I always felt that, at the time. I think I was not ungrateful."

"You have now an occasion of proving your gratitude. Do you know what Job said to his foolish wife when she was trying to excite him to anger and rebellion against his Creator? 'What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?'"



“My reason is fully convinced ; but oh ! the weak heart is aching sorely still. I think it will never cease to ache again.”

“Do you then despise the blessings that are left to you ?”

“No, no, indeed I hope not—my sweet Mary—ah, you know how I long to see her once more at home.”

Aunt Katherine remained gravely silent.

“You promised that she should be here at Christmas.”

“I have every wish, believe me, to keep this promise ; but Mary would be little benefited by witnessing your present state of dejection. She has felt her brother’s loss scarcely less than yourself.”

“Poor, tender darling ! she shall not be overlooked or neglected again. Alas ! I shall have her alone to cherish.”

“If I mistake not, the care of your little girl will give you ample occupation and interest for some time to come. Mary has fallen into very delicate health.”

It was not the words (for aunt Katherine

had often spoken to me before of Mary's delicate health and I had never attached any particular importance to it) but it was an indefinable something in the tone that accompanied the words, which caused me to start as if a dagger had pierced me, and to ask in a choked and trembling voice—

“You cannot mean that my child is seriously ill.”

“I do not know till I see her,” was the guarded reply. “Fanny has consulted a physician, but he seems quite uncertain about the case. The mild weather, combined with the sea air, has been very beneficial, and had you been well enough I should have proposed you going to her, instead of having her brought back to Ashvale.”

“I am quite well enough. I will go to-morrow,” I said, feeling a sudden energy that trampled upon all physical weakness; “but oh, Miss Sinclair, why did you not tell me this before?”

“Because I deemed it both useless and unwise to do so. I have told you nothing,

now, that need excite you as I see you *are* excited. Mary is young, and she has a good constitution. A few months may restore her to perfect health, but even should it be otherwise ——”

“Oh don’t—don’t,” I cried in an agony of supplication, as if my calm companion held in her hands the tender life she was discussing—“I have borne much, very, very much, God knoweth—but *that* I could not bear!”

“Is it a Christian mother who says she could not bear to yield her child to God?” asked aunt Katherine, in the stern voice which never failed to influence me—“I had hoped better things of one who professed to train her children for the enjoyment of their heavenly home! Have a care, or you will be called upon to make a harder sacrifice than has yet been demanded of you.”

In the midst of the sobs that were now bursting from my tortured heart (and, oh, what mother will not feel for me?) I said, scarcely knowing what I said :

“Tell me then what I am to do?”

There must have been impatience and anger and rebellion in my voice, for I felt all these at the time raging fiercely within me, but aunt Katherine only took my hand and fixing her eyes on my face—those pure calm eyes whose expression had led my Willie to liken her to a grown up angel, said with solemn gravity—

“My friend, there is a God whose ears are open !”

## CHAPTER XII.

ON the day but one after this, I walked with a firm step from my room, attired in travelling costume, and proceeded alone to take a mute farewell of every familiar object, endeared to me by associations with my worshipped children.

I had resolved, if Mary died, never to return to Ashvale; and the happiness I had enjoyed in this sweet and tranquil home made me desire to indulge in one last look at every room and every spot which had witnessed that exceeding happiness.

Oh! those tears that fell from my burning eyes, those sighs that broke from my weary heart, as I took my solitary rounds, and touched, with a feeling bordering on devotion,

each object that had been dear to the beloved ones that seemed lost to me for ever !

Their books and playthings had all been carefully removed ; but there was nothing in the house that had not some association in my mind with Willie or Mary. And the gardens, *their* gardens, how could I bear to look at them ! how could I endure the sight of the withered stalks, the unweeded beds, the more than wintry aspect of all that, even in winter time, had been so trim, and neat, and green, when the busy little hands were labouring here !

The orchard was too wet for me to venture far into it ; but I stood for several minutes gazing at the old, leafless trees, and thinking of the last morning on which my darlings had walked and raced so joyously together there. Then my mind took a rapid retrospect of the years I had spent at Ashvale ; and Bessie Graham, and my dear mother, and Fanny Cleve, all passed, in phantom guise, before me—passed, and gave place to two fairy forms, who stood alone in the fore-

ground of my picture, and, with moistened eyes and outstretched arms, seemed, with me, to be bidding a last adieu to scenes of vanished happiness.

It was a voice from the very depths of a broken heart that came up, and cried so piteously, "Oh, my little ones, my little ones, if not in life, let us, at least, in death, be once more united!"

"Come, come," said a firm voice behind me, "this is a bad preparation for the trying duties that may be before you. The carriage is at the door, and we are all waiting for you."

"I am ready, Miss Sinclair. I only wanted to take one more look at the old place, where I have had so much happiness."

"All nonsense, believe me. People get a habit of indulging in sentimentality, and become quite unfit to grapple with the realities of life. What can be more foolish than for a man who is going a journey to attach himself to any little bank he may chance to rest

upon by the way? Suppose there *are* a few fading flowers growing round it—what then, if the land to which he is bound have everlasting flowers and eternal sunshine !”

“But there are not many pilgrims who can keep their eyes so stedfastly fixed on their journey’s end as to be indifferent to the roughness of the road they are travelling.”

“Not many who *do* so, I grant you, and therefore they lose, or wilfully throw away, the richest consolation that Infinite mercy has offered them. Oh, my friend, let us only look onward a few years, and how trivial will all our present trials—*as* trials —appear to us.”

Miss Sinclair had promised not to leave me until the meeting with my Mary was over, and I had ascertained the worst that I had to anticipate. Nurse, and one of the other servants, were also to accompany us to the place where I had determined on passing the winter; and Ashvale, my dear, dear home, was to be shut up, and left desolate for the present.



It was a small sea-bathing town in the south of Devonshire, remarkable for the mildness of its air, to which aunt Katherine had sent my little girl; and, owing to my own recent illness, we were obliged to proceed so slowly, that it was not until the day before Christmas that we reached the termination of our journey.

Aunt Katherine said I had borne it very well; and praise from her was not to be despised; nevertheless, I was conscious of no increase of strength either mental or physical, and felt that it was excitement alone—that fever of the mind consequent upon the suspense I was enduring—which had kept me up till now.

The dreary twilight of a winter's evening was fast closing over land and sky, when our carriage stopped before the door of the quiet lodgings, facing the sea, that Fanny had chosen for herself and her precious charge.

The former, who had been all day expecting our arrival, stood in the passage, with flushed and anxious face, to receive us. One

hasty embrace, one look which asked and obtained the warmest sympathy a human heart could give, and I was eagerly enquiring how it was with my beloved Mary, why she too had not come down stairs to welcome us.

“Hush!” replied Fanny, leading the way into a little parlour on the ground floor, “Mary does not know that you are coming to-night. She has been a good deal excited since I told her you were to join us here, and I thought it better to let this excitement subside before I gave her further information. She is in bed now, and if she gets a good night’s rest, I am in hopes to see her better and calmer to-morrow.”

“But how can *I* wait for to-morrow?” I said impetuously—“have I not endured this agonizing suspense long enough?”

“You would wait a week if it were necessary,” replied aunt Katherine quietly,—“but you had better go and lie down now, and some of us will presently bring you a cup of tea.”

Fanny accompanied me to my room, and

evinced, by a multitude of affectionate attentions, her delight at having me with her again. But she looked pale and harassed, and seemed unwilling to enter with me upon the subject of Mary's health. All I could gather from her was, that my dear precious child appeared no longer what she used to be; that her sweet, buoyant spirits had become totally quenched, and that she would sometimes sit for hours resting her little face upon her hands, without uttering a word, or seeming conscious of any thing that was passing around her.

"Does she ever speak of her brother?" I asked chokingly, trying in vain to look out beyond the dark shadows that pressed upon me as Fanny spoke.

"Rarely now," was the answer, accompanied by a huskiness of voice that gave me little comfort; "but I fear she thinks of him as much as ever."

"My tender lambs! they did so love each other."

"But you shall not talk to-night," said

Fanny, making an effort to choke down her own tears, as she bent over me, and bathed my throbbing temples, and caressed and soothed me as a tender sister might have done; "It will be all right, I hope, now you are come. A mother has so much influence over her child."

"Dear Fanny, you have been playing the mother's part lately, and it has made your cheek pale and your eyes sad. I ought to insist on associating you no longer with my hapless fate; for I see an evil destiny pursuing me, which affects all who come within its circle."

"Nay, nay; you know me better than to suppose I would leave you now trouble has fallen on you—besides, did I not need the lesson? Did not my stubborn heart require some such proof of those things it was so slow to believe?"

"Ah, Fanny, your stumbling block, if you still have one, will never be found in *my* happiness again. I had not thought of this before. Truly our Teacher is a skilful one."

"Will you try to sleep for half an hour? I am sure you are quite worn out."

"I am very weary—and Miss Sinclair will be expecting you down stairs."

"Well, I will leave you for a short time; but if you cannot sleep you must let me come to you again. I often get Mary to sleep by singing a little hymn by her bedside—one of the old favourites that she still clings to."

"Fanny, I *must* see my child to-night. I can surely stand and look at her without danger of awaking her."

"Well, try and get some sleep yourself, and then we will talk about Mary afterwards."

I was really too exhausted to say another word; and in a few minutes from the time my companion went out, I had followed her advice, and thus lost for awhile the consciousness of all my sorrows.

From a dream of brighter days, I awoke to find aunt Katherine standing near me, with a cup of tea in her hand, and an ex-

pression on her face, which said plainly, "It is high time for you to exert yourself."

"Oh, why did you take the trouble of bringing this?" I began, as I sat up and received the refreshment she was offering me. "Nurse can very well wait upon me; she cannot be more tired than you are."

"I do not expect you to want waiting upon after to-night," was the prompt reply, "you came here to play the parts of nurse and doctor; and if you are unfit for these you had better go home again."

"Let me just go and look at Mary, and then I shall feel fit for anything."

"Very well; drink your tea, and come into the next room—only remember that if you wake the child, you are likely to do her a serious injury."

I promised to be caution itself, and getting up as quickly as my weakness and weariness would allow, followed Miss Sinclair with noiseless steps to the adjoining apartment.

It was a large room, and there was a bright clear fire burning in the grate, and a

shaded lamp standing on the table. Fanny's bed concealed a smaller one beside it, until we had advanced far into the room; and even then, from the peculiar softness of the light thrown on that end of the apartment, I could almost have fancied both the bed and its occupant an illusion of my own excited mind, so dim, and shadowy, and unreal it all appeared to me.

Can anything in nature be more beautiful, or speak in more touching accents to the human heart, than sleeping childhood. Apart from particular interest or association, the thing itself—the union of perfect innocence and perfect repose—is a picture well worth gazing on; but when the picture is our own, when we feel that that master-piece of God's finished works, undimmed, unsullied by the world's pollutions, is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, then indeed may our hearts well bound with rapture, and our grateful souls look up with quiet gladness and tell their joy to Heaven.

And were these the feelings with which I

gazed on my sleeping Mary, and listened to those hard, irregular breathings, that betokened the presence of disease in that tender frame? Were these the feelings with which I marked the flushed and wasted cheek, the eyelash moist with tears, and the thin pale hands thrown listlessly across the pillow? Were these the feelings with which I fell on my knees beside the bed, and prayed in desperation for strength to support me to the end?

The end! what would it be—when would it be? Oh! weak heart, do you not dare to look at it! Must more discipline be gone through, a hotter furnace prepared, before the perfectly educated will can bow in meek submission, and say to its Divine Instructor, “*Thy* will be done!”

It was not with any hope of reading comfort in my companion’s face that I turned, after a few minutes silent prayer, to look at her. I felt intuitively that earth had *no hope* for me; but my torn heart yearned, at that moment, for human sympathy, with an agony that words cannot describe.



"Come away, now," said Miss Sinclair, extending her hand to raise me, "I have something I wish to say to you in your own room."

We went there immediately, and sitting down on the bed, I waited patiently for my friend to speak.

"You think it a hard and perhaps a cruel thing," she began, "that God should require you to give up your child to Him. I believe I read something like this in the expression of your face just now."

"And if you did," I replied hoarsely, "can you be much surprised at it. I have asked for submission, I have entreated strength—but oh, Miss Sinclair, to lose both — both my children ! should it be required of me ?"

"Do you know what to-morrow is ?" aunt Katherine demanded abruptly.

"Yes, indeed I do. Last Christmas-day, my little ones were blooming in health and happiness around me. They each wrote me a letter, the precious darlings ! wishing me

a merry Christmas, and — oh, Miss Sinclair, why did you remind me of this?"

"I had no intention of recalling last Christmas-day to your memory. I wished to carry you back to a Christmas-day more than eighteen hundred years ago. Do you remember what happened then?"

"Surely I do. The Saviour of mankind was born into the world."

"And who was the Saviour of mankind?"

"The Son of God."

"God's dear Son. The Lamb without spot or blemish. He who was in the bosom of the Father, before the worlds were made. He of whom God said, 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow!' Do you think your child is dearer to you than Christ was to the Eternal God?"

"Ah! Miss Sinclair, you make me feel all my ingratitude, all my vileness. What shall I say?"

"Say, that since God was willing to give up His only and beloved Son *for* you, you

are ready to give up one of your dear children *to* him. In the one case, there was a cruel death and inconceivable sufferings in question ; in the other, there is a gentle passage from time to a happy and a glorious eternity."

"May that Saviour who thus died and suffered, impart His strength to me now ! I will remember the Infinite Love which led to this wondrous sacrifice, and be patient, even if I cannot be resigned."

"It is my comfort to know," said Miss Sinclair, "that the discipline you are under can by no means fail of doing its work, and that you will one day bless the rod which at present you feel so keenly, because with David you will be enabled to affirm, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.'"

### CHAPTER XIII.

It was only by slow degrees and with the utmost caution that those around her dared break to my poor Mary the intelligence of my being in the house. Our first meeting was a most affecting one, and but for aunt Katherine's restraining presence would probably have had an injurious effect upon us both. The moment Mary sprang to my arms and sobbed out her passionate entreaties that I would never leave her again, Miss Sinclair interposed, and taking my little girl upon her own knee, began talking to her in that quiet, sober manner which was so admirably calculated to check any manifestation of excitement, even if it failed to subdue the excitement itself.

"Mary must remember that poor mama

has been very ill, and that as she has now come to take care of her little daughter, it will be the little daughter's duty to refrain from word or look that can distress her. I shall hope to receive a good account of you all, and as I am quite sure that Mary wishes to please God, I can have no fear of her doing anything to grieve or excite the kind friends and parent He has given her."

"I will be good, aunt Katherine," whispered my darling, between the sighs and tears she was struggling hard to have done with, "only mama won't leave me again, will she?"

"No, my dear child, I do not think she will ; but if mama, and aunt Katherine, and Fanny, and nurse were all away, would Mary be alone?"

The sweet eyes were turned for a moment wistfully upon the questioner, as if they would have deprecated the very idea of such utter desertion ; but then, with a faint smile breaking on the pale lips, my Mary said decidedly,

"No, aunt Katherine; I should not be alone."

"May the blessings of that Shepherd who gathered the lambs in his bosom, be upon you for evermore!" exclaimed Miss Sinclair, with moistened eyes, as she gave my child into my arms again, and left us for awhile together.

The next day aunt Katherine took her departure, and I commenced with a bruised and breaking heart the duty of watching over my precious and rapidly fading flower—commenced that slow but searching discipline which was to teach me all my frailty, and to bring me into real communion with that ever present Saviour who has a balm for every woe. His people are called upon to endure.

But as we are told that "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," so it was that I rarely had faith to look beyond the trial to its end and object, and that I was so often in danger of sinking altogether, under the fury of the waves that beat upon my breast.

The more I saw of the tender, loving, and now, I cannot doubt, sanctified heart of my sweet Mary, the more cruel and bitter was the pain of watching the progress of the canker-worm that was eating her young life away. And then to know that grief had done it all, that the little heart was literally broken—oh, it was this that penetrated into the very depths of my being, and caused me at times to feel that my punishment was greater than I could bear.

A dreary, cheerless life we led while the winter months continued, and while the weather, though milder than in other parts, forbade our taking our sick lamb without the doors of the house to breathe the pure air of heaven. During all this time both Fanny and myself devoted the greater portion of every day to my poor Mary, who, propped up on a little couch by the window, would watch the rough sea for hours together, while I read aloud, or Fanny sang to her.

Aunt Katherine had advised me not to encourage the child in talking much of her

brother, and I never found that she had any disposition to do so ; but each morning, when the post came in, if Mary happened to be present, I observed the sudden flush of expectation on the wasted cheek, and the kindling of a light that was not natural in the sweet, pure eye.

Alas ! it was emotion spent in vain, for no letters, no news of any kind concerning my lost Willie arrived, and I believe every fresh disappointment untwined a new thread of that silver cord which was so soon to be loosed for ever.

Early in February the weather became mild and settled, sufficiently so at least to permit of the little invalid being drawn about in a low chair on the sands, where the pure breeze from the ocean appeared to put temporary life into the languishing frame, and the objects of interest around to refresh and animate the drooping spirits.

On all these occasions I was my child's companion, and there were moments when I was tempted to forget, in the sweetness of



our present intercourse, the inevitable doom that was hanging over me. Mary herself not unfrequently dissipated the cheating vision.

"Mama," she said one day, when we were alone on the quiet sands together, "I used at first to wish I might find Willie in heaven when I go there. It was a cruel and a selfish thought, mama; I don't wish it any longer."

"Why not, my darling?" I asked, though indeed there was no necessity for my doing so.

"Because you would then be alone always. Now I can hope that when I am gone papa will bring back Willie to you. I think he will, mama."

"Ah, my dearest, how can I bear to dwell even on Willie's return, if there was no Mary to welcome him."

"You will have each other to love, my own mama, and you must promise me that if it is so, you will not let your grief for my loss prevent your comforting and petting Willie."

She meant it not—the innocent, tender-hearted lamb—but oh, the reproach contained in these few words! how my weak spirit quailed beneath them.

Presently Mary said again—

“ I often think, mama, of you and Willie going together to look at my grave, and talking about the old times, and about our pic-nics to the blue-bell valley, and all that we used to do when we were so happy ; and mama, I have sometimes wondered whether I shall know what you are doing, and whether——”

A sob I could not restrain revealed to her what I was suffering, and then came the fond and earnest entreaty, “ Forgive me, my own, own mama ; I forgot, indeed I did, and I told aunt Katherine I would always remember.”

“ Never mind, my Mary,” I said at length. “ If you love to talk of these things I will learn to bear it too. God knoweth that I rejoice at my child’s willingness to depart at her Saviour’s summons. And it is only folly

to shut our eyes to what we are very sure must one day come upon us."

A few more weeks of patient sufferings on the one part, and agonizing watchings on the other went slowly by, and then there came a day when Mary, raising herself from her little carriage, beside which I was walking on the sands, and looking wearily over the wide expanse of waters, whose monotonous music had so long fallen on her ear, whispered earnestly and beseechingly to me,

"Take me home again, mama. I long so to be at home."

"To Ashvale, my Mary?" I asked, astonished greatly at this sudden request.

"Yes, mama. I want to look upon the green fields and trees again. There may be fields and trees in heaven; but we know that 'there will be no more sea'—you read it to me this morning, mama; and I am tired of the sea's cold, cold, face, and its dull, melancholy sound."

As all hope of my Mary's ultimate recovery had long been abandoned, and the

only question was one of present relief from suffering, I saw no reason why this request should not be complied with ; and the physician who attended her recommending all the indulgence possible, we made preparations for returning to Ashvale at the beginning of April.

How well I remember the day of our arrival there, although the events that passed rapidly upon it might reasonably have obliterated both that and everything else from my mind. Mary had got through the fatigue of the long journey much better than we had dared to anticipate ; but I think the excitement of returning to the home she loved so dearly had given her a kind of fictitious strength, and imparted to the sweet face the animation we could not but rejoice to witness.

“ Here we are, mama ! ” she exclaimed in a joyous whisper, as the carriage entered the lane that led to the house ; “ and see how brightly the sun is shining ! Oh, mama, you will let nurse help me to walk

once round the dear old garden I have been looking at so long in my dreams."

"My precious! nobody shall help you but myself," I replied, with as much composure as I was able to assume; "but you are not strong enough to walk to-day, dearest. Wait at least till to-morrow."

The little cheek flushed brightly, as she said, "It shall be, of course, as you like best, mama; but I should *so* have liked it to-day."

"Let it be to-day," pleaded Fanny, who lived, I verily believe, but for the gratification of my child; "we can easily support her between us, or I could carry her myself, for that matter—it would not be the first time."

It was at length arranged, that as the sun was likely to shine for another hour, Mary should rest herself for half of that period, and then be gratified in her ardent desire of walking once more round the dear old garden, where she and her brother had worked and played from her earliest recol-

lection—where, alas ! they would never either work or play together again.

“ Ah, mama, please let me stop for a minute here.—The poor old beds ! how desolate and miserable they look. I never thought to see them look like this, mama. There is a little heartsease just coming into flower ; but the geraniums—my pretty geraniums, that I was to have taken such care of during the winter—are all dead. I don’t like the look of dead flowers, mama. Will you promise me, some day, to have mine and Willie’s garden put in order again ?”

“ Immediately, my darling, if it will give you pleasure. What would I not do, Mary, love, to bring one smile to that precious face !”

“ No, not yet, mama, thank you. Some day before Willie comes back to you.”

I knew the thought of that tender heart. It was to spare the beloved brother the sharp pain she was herself enduring, but which for my sake was so bravely concealed.

“ And now have you not walked enough, my Mary ?” I said, when we had taken her

twice round all the garden, and allowed her to gaze, with a look of lingering tenderness, on every tree and shrub associated with happier days. "You lean heavily, my sweet one, as if you were greatly fatigued."

"The poor little body is weak, I suppose, mama," she replied, with a smile that, for all its gentleness and purity, struck chill at my heart; "but I don't much mind that, mama, because you know why, don't you, my own mama?"

As I really could not reply, Mary repeated in a firm tone—

" 'For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.' You do not grudge me my house eternal, do you, dear mama?"

"I try not to do so, my Mary; but I have a harder battle to fight than I had ever dreamt of before. Let us go in now, dearest. I long to see you resting that poor little head on your pillow again."

That evening, after a short sleep, my dear

child awoke suddenly, and stretching out her hand to Fanny, who was sitting near her couch, whispered something in a low and I thought unusually feeble voice. At the same time, she made a signal for me to come and sit beside her, which I did immediately, encircling the thin, shadowy form in my arms, and causing the dear pale face to rest against my bosom.

"Is Fanny to sing to you, love?" I had just asked, when Fanny herself answered me by beginning the beautiful hymn which had lately been an especial favourite with my dying child.

" Vital spark of heavenly flame,  
Quit, oh quit this mortal frame!  
Trembling, hoping, ling'ring, flying—  
Oh the pain, the bliss of dying!"

"I can't go on, Mary, darling," said the kind singer, as tears rushed in torrents to her eyes; "you are looking so—so unlike yourself. Kiss me, my lamb, and tell me you forgive me for being so foolish. Nay, mama will not be jealous. *I* love you dearly too, Mary."



A smile, that seemed to me more beautiful than anything earthly could be, parted my Mary's lips for a moment, as she stretched out the hand I had left at liberty, and drew the sobbing Fanny towards her.

"I know you have all loved me well," she whispered in a hollow tone,—“too well, because you do not want to give me up; but I am going to Him who loves me even better than you all, and mama will remember this when I am gone, and be glad. My own mama, you are crying too—crying because your little girl is going home before you. Ah, mama, you ought to sing for joy to think that all my sufferings will so soon be over.”

“Soon, my dearest,” I cried, in agony; “you do not mean that you feel worse than usual to-night?”

“No, not worse, mama, but better—much better; because, while I slept I saw the gates of that land where there will be no more pain, neither sorrow nor crying. You must tell my Willie, when he comes back to you, how glad I was to die, and that my

last message to him was to beg that he would give all his heart to Jesus—*all his heart*, mama, because Jesus wants it all—and it is far better to love him than the things of this world, which fade away and die. I am very happy, mama, and I should be happier still if I thought you would not grieve when I am gone.”

“My Mary, I *cannot* part with you. My heart’s treasure, you will not leave me desolate and alone.”

I scarcely knew what I said. My mind was all in wild confusion ; and notwithstanding the long discipline it had undergone, there was an obstinate determination to resist, to the very last, a belief in the reality of the threatened woe.

Oh how speedily and effectually God can rebuke our presumptuous assertions, and make the pitiful human will crouch and grovel in the very dust before the will divine.

Scarcely had I spoken the passionate and rebellious words—“I cannot part with you,”

—ere I saw the pure cheek change its hue,  
the deep-veined eyelid drop as in utter  
weariness, and all the angel face put on that  
look which tells its own sad tale without the  
aid of human voice or utterance.

“My child ! my child ! would God that  
I had died for thee !”

But the lily was gathered to its home,  
and not even a mother’s breaking heart  
could recall the pure spirit from its “house  
eternal in the heavens !”

## CHAPTER XIV.

THERE is a sorrow that has never yet been expressed in human words ; there is a silent mourning of the heart which no language, however eloquent, has yet been able to describe. We read of Rachel weeping for her children, and it is added that she would not be comforted, because they were not. The mother who loses her children will not be comforted. These are simple, every day words, yet they are the best that can be found to convey an idea of a mother's grief in her bereavement.

And such a grief was mine, without voice, without language, audible at least to mortal ears. I told it to the silent trees beneath which my little ones had wandered together, I told it to the opening flowers their dear

hands had planted and tended, I told it to the shining stars their young eyes had loved to gaze upon, I told it to the happy birds with whose silvery notes their pretty, prattling voices had mingled, but above all I told it to that tender and ever pitying Friend who alone *could* know the depth of sadness hidden within my crushed and bleeding heart.

But oh, to lay my darling in the dull churchyard, to see the cold earth piled upon the little coffin, to feel that she was for ever gone from my gaze, and that the sound of her sweet joyous voice would never, never, never while life continued, fall on my ear again! This was drinking sorrow's cup to the very dregs. This was learning the utter vanity and nothingness of earthly idols.

Yet I did not sink this time. Neither was my reason for a moment clouded by the storm that was sweeping over me. I recognized the hand of a righteous God, and in the midst of my own utter desolation I was able to breathe a fervent prayer of

thanksgiving for the precious evidences He had permitted me to see of my child's interest in the atoning Sacrifice.

I think the most bitter moment of all was that in which I returned home after my Mary's funeral and heard the gates close heavily behind me, which seemed to put the last barrier between the living and the dead. Then indeed my knees did falter, and there was a sensation at my heart as if a hand of ice had suddenly been laid upon it. But my watchful friend stood by, and reminded me of that "house eternal in the heavens," where I should ere long join my beloved one, never to part again.

Ah, I had need of every consolation to support me through the long, long days that followed—the days of sunshine and of opening flowers, the sweet spring days, to which I had always looked forward with such a full, glad heart when my precious children were blooming in health and beauty in our tranquil home.

Now, the sun shone as brightly, the

flowers sprang as freshly, all nature smiled as sweetly and as joyously as before—and yet to me it was like another world.

“The birds sang in the branches,  
With sweet, familiar tone,  
But the voices of the children  
Will be heard in dreams alone.”

The long period that had elapsed since my Willie was taken from me, without bringing any tidings of him, had at last suggested an idea that was daily gaining strength when my Mary died. The idea was that he too must be dead, and that I should never press to my heart a living child again.

This thought I need scarcely say had added inconceivably to all my sufferings, and had created that feeling of utter and hopeless desolation to which I have above referred.

It is a precious word of comfort for the people of God which saith, “He stayeth his rough wind in the day of his east wind,”—

and through every fibre of my frame ran a joyous confirmation of this assertion when about three months from the time I had parted from my sweet Mary, a letter from my long lost Willie was put into my hands.

Let me pause awhile to recall that intensely interesting moment, the moment when I recognized my own darling's writing, when with a feeling that was too strange and overpowering for joy I pressed the letter wildly to my lips, wept such tears as none but a mother can weep, and then, before I dared to break the seal, rushed to my room, and poured out on my knees a prayer of broken thanksgiving that no mortal ear could have understood.

The letter was without date, but it appeared to have been written some time. The postmark was London, but the foreign paper and the peculiar style of the writing convinced me that it had not been written there.

Ah, my Willie, those stiff, formal sentences were not the dictates of your own



pure and simple mind, those cold words never came from that warm and loving heart. But what then? I *knew* that heart and mind were unchanged, and since the same world contained both him and me, there might, nay there *must*, come a day when every thought should be again poured, as once it was, into the fond mother's ear.

This was the letter :

“ My dear Mama,

“ I am very glad to be able to write to you, and to tell you that I am exceedingly comfortable at school, that every body is kind to me, and that I am getting on pretty well with my various studies. I wish I could sometimes see you and my dear sister. I often think of you both, and I never forget to pray for you and Mary when I say my prayers. Pray give my best love to Miss Cleve, and to my sister, also to aunt Katherine, when you write to her.

“ I remain, my dear mama,

“ Your dutiful son,

“ WILLIAM EDWARD SINCLAIR.”

I took this letter to my Mary's grave, and as I had before told my grief to all the silent objects around me, so now I told my joy, dim and clouded as it was, to the green mound beneath which the mortal part of my bright-eyed child had found a home till earth's great wakening day. Here I read again and again those few precious words that were to me like an angel's voice bidding hope come forth from its hiding place, and brighten once more the gloomy desert so long deprived of its blessed rays.

Then I went home and claimed the sympathy of the dear friend who still remained to share my dreary lot, and to assuage its bitterness by every means the most thoughtful and tender affection could devise.

From this time Fanny and myself had a subject of unfailing interest to discuss, and one that we could approach without opening anew those heart wounds which in this world might never be altogether healed. We both concluded now that my Willie was in France or Germany, and I thought that if I could

only get a letter conveyed to my husband, he could not refuse, under the circumstances of my terrible bereavement, to allow me at least to visit our sole remaining child.

Aunt Katherine still continued unremitting in her exertions to obtain intelligence of Edward's movements, and at length I received from her a communication which gave me some little hope.

It was to the effect that Mr. Sinclair had withdrawn the whole of his property from the hands of the bankers to whom it was entrusted, and that although they refused to say whether they were acquainted with his present abode, there could be little doubt that it was so, as at aunt Katherine's earnest request, they had at length agreed to do what they could in getting a letter forwarded to him.

It will be scarcely necessary to say that I lost not an hour in writing to my husband, and in imploring his permission to visit my son, and to be allowed the consolation of an unrestricted correspondence with him. I

dwelt at some length on the circumstances of our dear Mary's death, but forbore to add a single word of reproach for the cruelty my husband had practised towards us all. I knew if he had still a human heart beating in his breast, it must be touched by the details I had given him.

I think it must have been about a month after this when, one morning, as I was returning from a solitary walk round the orchard, Fanny met me at the door of the house, and begged me, in a strangely excited voice, to come up stairs with her immediately.

“What is it, Fanny? has the post come in yet—have you heard any thing in which *I* am particularly interested?”

By this time I was scarcely less excited than herself, for I felt convinced she had received intelligence of Willie, and hurrying with my companion to my own bed-room, I locked the door, and entreated her not to keep me in suspense.

“I will not,” said Fanny, taking a letter

from her pocket ; “ but this is so strange, so unaccountable, that I cannot believe in its reality.”

I could only *look* my intense anxiety, and after bidding me be composed, and setting me a wretched example of composure herself, Fanny continued :—

“ This letter is from Mr. Leslie. I don’t know where it comes from. I will not read you the first part, which is but a repetition of his old protestations, only couched in stronger language, and breathing a spirit with which, thank God, my own has no communion. But listen now—I will begin at this paragraph.

“ You thought it was the easiest and the most natural thing in the world to make your disinterested friend the medium of conveying to me your cold refusal of my proffered love. So it was, very easy and very natural indeed, and so are many things that have a most unlooked-for and disastrous result. Let me tell you that the heart you rejected has some odd stuff in it, which though not bitter in

itself, a single word of unkindness or disdain will change to the bitterness of gall. That was a pretty boy I saw playing in his mother's garden the morning you sent me forth a desolate and a hopeless man. That boy is now alone in a foreign school, and he is but a little fellow to be away from all his friends, but it was a pity to keep him at home to imbibe the fanatical sentiments of your amiable friend ; besides, I know how those tender and soft-eyed children have a way of holding all hearts in bondage, and it was not agreeable to me to reflect that the love you refused to me was bestowed on the puny boy you were engaged to educate ! But I give you credit of your pupil, though I thus speak ; there is something manly and noble about the boy, and I have no fear but that he'll bear himself bravely among the untamed and untameable little tyrants by whom he is surrounded. To come, however, to the point of my present letter. I will let you into the secret of the child's whereabouts, and give you an opportunity of gratifying the amiable

friend to whom you are so devoted, on the condition of your becoming my wife when I return to England. I am making a fortune rapidly, otherwise I should have delayed this communication, but I owe a considerable sum to the father of your young prodigy, who will probably return to England at the same time as myself. You see how I am risking his displeasure by offering to give up his secret, but he is not a bad-hearted fellow, and would be glad to hear of my happiness.

“In conclusion, I have only to add, that if you still reject me, or decline answering this letter, the boy will not be very likely to see his mother within the next ten years, and as he’s evidently a tender-hearted youngster that would really be a thing to grieve over.

“Yours, as you shall decide,

“JAMES ARTHUR LESLIE.”

As Fanny finished reading this extraordinary letter, she raised her eyes to mine, and we sat for a few minutes gazing at each

other in a kind of stupid wonderment. My friend was the first to speak.

“To think,” she said, with indignation trembling in every accent of her voice, “that this is the man with whom I would have passed my life! Oh, the unsuspected depths of wickedness that the human heart may foster.”

“And to think,” I replied, “that my vague dread of Mr. Leslie should be thus strikingly explained—but oh, that Edward should have been influenced by such a serpent.”

“And that your re-union with your dear boy should rest on the will of a passionate and vindictive and unworthy creature like this—”

“Nay,” I said, feeling a sudden spirit of calm confidence kindling within me, “you are wrong, Fanny. Neither my fate nor that of my darling Willie can rest for a moment in any human hands. This poor victim of his own ungoverned passions is but an instrument in the hands of One who will



never suffer the wicked to triumph in the end. The present anguish, which Mr. Leslie has so skilfully sought to heighten, may well be endured a little longer, and then his turn will come."

"What shall I do about answering the letter?" said Fanny, whose excitement had given place to a deep sadness, the burden of which I had no difficulty in understanding.

"Did you not tell me that it was without date or address?"

"Without date, but there is an address to an office in London from whence he says any communications can be forwarded."

"What is your own wish on the subject?"

"To remain silent. How could I write to him with the calmness befitting a Christian?"

"I think silence will be best indeed—but shall we not consult Miss Sinclair?"

Fanny winced for a moment at this proposal, but immediately after assented to its expediency, and we then went over again

slowly and patiently, every word of the perplexing letter.

It appeared abundantly evident that my husband and Mr. Leslie were together, and that they were in some foreign country remote from the spot where Willie had been placed at school. I thought, also, that I could now understand the object of that withdrawal of Edward's money, which had struck me as so singular before. He had probably lent it to his reckless companion, who was now, as he said, making enough to repay him in the country to which he had gone.

But what was my husband doing so far from home, and why had he cut off all means of communication with myself? did he fear my reproaches for his cruelty with regard to Willie, or was he anxious for the money he had squandered in such an unworthy cause? Had Mr. Leslie's influence alone induced him to deprive me of my boy, or was this influence only the turning point in the scale of his own previous inclinations on the subject?

While I sat pondering intently over these matters, and trying to keep my imagination from wandering too anxiously to a far off scene that busy fancy painted, Fanny had remained with her head resting on her hands, and her eyes firmly closed as if to shut out some objects that offended them, or to keep in the tears which would be no relief to the wounded heart.

Suddenly she looked up, and said in a tone of deep and earnest feeling.

“Dear friend, have you not been thinking that I am the miserable cause of the great suffering under which you have so long been groaning? It is too true whether you have been thinking of it or not, and though I have not been without my trials before, I can truly say that the last hour has been the most agonizing of my whole life.”

“Fanny,” I replied, taking her cold hand and holding it in my own, “believe me when I declare that my heart contains no particle of bitterness towards you; but let us both try to learn anew the lesson placed before us, nor think any error trivial or unimportant.”

when we see that its consequences may spread and widen like the tiniest circle in the water till a space is covered whose boundary or termination we cannot ascertain."

## CHAPTER XV.

MISS SINCLAIR invited both Fanny and myself to spend the winter with her; and although I had previously declined a most pressing invitation from my cousin William and his wife, I thought it would be desirable and expedient to accept that of aunt Katherine, whose clear judgment might be a great assistance to me in the difficulties by which I was surrounded.

I wanted to consult with her on the intelligence we had recently obtained, and also to ask her advice concerning a plan I had in contemplation for going abroad in search of my child, should no answer arrive, within a reasonable period, to the letter I had written to my husband.

There was only one link that bound us to

Ashvale now, and that was its vicinity to the little churchyard where my sweet Mary rested, and where I had loved to walk in the long quiet summer evenings, recalling the past, and looking forward to a still brighter future, when with both my beloved children I should stand within that glorious land whose mansions grow fairer and more radiant with every dear and precious one we see ascending there before us.

To secure to myself hereafter the indulgence of constantly visiting my Mary's grave, I made arrangements for purchasing the house of which I had been so long a tenant, and, placing my old nurse in charge of it, I left all my household goods untouched, pleasing myself with the idea that if ever my Willie returned, he should find his home unchanged, saving in that one great and irreparable loss which through our lives we must ever mourn together.

Fanny went with me, the last evening of our stay at Ashvale, to visit that sacred spot I was so reluctant to leave. We were

both exceedingly depressed, and the sound of the chill autumn wind moaning through the deserted churchyard was not calculated to brighten our spirits, or to render our sorrowful errand less painful or affecting.

It was very cold, and a drizzling misty rain was beginning to fall; nevertheless, we stood for several minutes gazing silently on the plain marble tablet, which told only that a young child was sleeping beneath, and that her name was Mary Sinclair.

This was to the crowd, to the idle passers by—but oh to me, to the desolate forsaken mother, a far different tale was told. Who will read it with me? who will go down into the lonely chambers of my heart, and learn the vanity of earthly hopes and earthly idols? who will patiently weigh the joy against the sorrow, the smiles against the tears, and then make up the long account, and see whether the balance is in favour of spending the heart's affections on things of earth, or of giving them in their freshness and their purity to heaven? Who will turn over, for

their profit and instruction, the pages of that mysterious book, on every leaf of which, save one, is inscribed the words, "Love not," in letters grown pale from the human tears that have fallen on them? And who will take that one page to their hearts, and learn the beautiful lessons, and discover for whom, and for what, the deep well springs of affection may be wakened up, and fearlessly pour out their richest treasures, reading as they go the animating words "Love on!"

My precious child, my innocent, my undefiled! how could I grudge you to that home where wisdom is taught without the aid of human suffering, where a Father's loving voice is the book from which you learn, and a Saviour's gracious smiles the blessed reward of your obedience!

"She is not dead—the child of our affection—  
But gone unto that school  
Where she no longer needs our poor protection,  
And Christ himself doth rule.

\* \* \*



“Not as a child shall we again behold her,  
For when, with raptures wild,  
In our embraces we again enfold her,  
She will not be a child ;

“But a fair maiden, in her Father’s mansion,  
Clothed with celestial grace,  
And beautiful with all the soul’s expansion,  
Shall we behold her face.”

Farewell, my sweet, sweet Mary ! When next I stand beside the green mound that covers you, may I feel the hand of a living child warm within my own, and hear that voice whose sound will allay the restless fever that burns in my heart to-night. Father, grant me the grace of patience, and let me under all circumstances be enabled to say, “Thy will be done.”

Silently and mournfully we left the churchyard, and early the following morning took our seats in the coach that was to convey us to Miss Sinclair’s house, in the immediate neighbourhood of London.

I was surprised, on our arrival, to find how

very humbly aunt Katherine was now living ; for although I had heard of her loss of fortune, neither Fanny nor herself had ever spoken to me of any deprivation of personal comforts ; and I had consequently pictured her as keeping up the same sort of establishment she had maintained at Beulah Cottage ; which was indeed so remarkably quiet and unostentatious that it never occurred to me that a gentlewoman could do with less.

I soon discovered, however, that there was a very vast difference now ; and, accustomed to habits of ease and luxury myself, I thought at first that I should find it hard to conform to the ways of my strongminded and estimable relative. She kept no regular servant, and only had a little girl to assist occasionally in the household work ; so that we were all required to make our own beds, to dust our rooms, and to do a great many other things which I, at least, knew no more about than an infant.

“Never mind—Learn ;” said aunt Katherine, when I was obliged to confess my ig-

norance, "bodily labour keeps the mind in health, and enables us to sympathize with those who spend their lives at it. I can't afford to be idle myself; but if I could, I should'nt like it. Idle people grow sentimental; and sentimentality bears no wholesome fruit in this world, whatever it may do in another."

Had I anybody except aunt Katherine to deal with, I should have proposed hiring a servant at my own expense; but Fanny warned me not to attempt such a foolish thing, and assured me that in a few weeks I should cease to regard as annoyances those privations to which I found it so difficult to reconcile myself at present.

"But how is it, Fanny?" I asked, "that if Miss Sinclair is so very poor, she can give money to such scores of people? Surely, even Christians are not bound to deny themselves common necessities—and a servant would not be a great expense."

"You had better enquire of aunty about this," said Fanny, with a smile that convinced

me she knew and approved the principle on which our hostess acted.

I took an opportunity of doing so, when, one very wet day, Miss Sinclair returned from visiting a sick woman, with evidences of fatigue and exhaustion in her countenance, too marked to be concealed.

"Do you really think it necessary to devote yourself so entirely to others?" I said, as Fanny ran to find dry shoes and stockings, and to carry away the dripping garments aunt Katherine had taken off.

"What do you mean by 'necessary'?" she asked in her grave, peculiar way.

"Oh! I mean do you think it an indispensable part of a christian character to forget self, and everything connected with the interests of the present world, on all occasions, as you do."

"Christian characters may vary, as much as worldly characters," she replied immediately, "but my principle is this; not to think how *little* I can do, and yet get safe to Heaven; but to think how *much* I can do

for Him who has purchased me a mansion in my Father's house. Having set out with the full persuasion that this is not my home, I am in no anxiety concerning the lodgings I may occupy, or the food I may eat, during the short period of my earthly sojourn. I know that I shall never be without *some* lodgings and *some* food; and I know also that my Father is the best judge of the kind of lodging and the kind of food that is good for me."

"But you give away such a large proportion of your income. You cannot mean that God requires you to do this."

"He knows that I am willing to do it; and it certainly must be agreeable to His will likewise, or He would not send me so many persons to relieve."

"Then supposing fewer opportunities of doing good were presented to you, should you think it was because God willed you to keep more for yourself?"

"I should be inclined to think He was displeased with my stewardship; and I should

regret it as one of the greatest misfortunes that could befall me."

"In short, you do everything in reference to another world, and that of course makes the great difference."

"Does it, then, seem to you extraordinary that a Christian should act out those principles which he professes from the moment he calls himself a disciple of Jesus? Let us have done with half-hearted devotion, and lukewarmness in the spiritual life. I can have no sympathy with those Christians who are for ever moaning over their infirmities, and quoting in excuse for themselves—'The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak;' as if the flesh here spoken of meant the natural corruptions of the human heart, instead of that bodily weakness which betrayed the disciples into drowsiness when they ought to have been awake and watching with their afflicted Master. Remember the angel's rebuke to the Laodicean church, and never fear that any of us shall do too much for Him who poured out His soul unto death for us."

I soon found that, in spite of bed-making and other unaccustomed labours, it was good for me to be with aunt Katherine in her own humble home. The constant and untiring activity she displayed, the repeated self-denials she practised, the fearlessness she ever manifested in confessing her Saviour before an ungodly world, could not but have a beneficial influence on all around her. And then, there were all the rich stores of her spiritually enlightened mind, from which Fanny and myself were allowed to draw as often and as largely as we pleased—surely it would have been well worth becoming the veriest household drudge, for the privilege of living for a few months under the same roof with aunt Katherine.

Amongst persons in her own rank of life, she kept up an exceedingly limited acquaintance; being of opinion, that unless society could be made subservient to the one great object to which her life was devoted, it would be wrong to indulge in it. The old clergyman I had formerly met at Beulah cottage,

came two or three times during the winter, and attacked Miss Sinclair on her dissenting principles ; but she declined, as on the previous occasion, entering into argument ; and assured him that he lost his time in endeavouring to make her close her eyes, now that they had once been opened.

After one of these visits, I said to her—  
“ I wish you would explain to me fully the points on which you dissent from the Church. I should so like to hear.”

“ Excuse me,” she replied firmly, “ I do not consider this a part of my duty. If you are satisfied that the church to which you belong is scriptural, it would be altogether profitless to inquire into the opinions of other people. If you are *not* satisfied on this point, then take the New Testament, and examine the matter prayerfully for yourself. But never let idle curiosity influence you in things so sacred and important. I believe that if a man is *fully persuaded in his own mind* that what he adheres to is right and scriptural, he may be as faithful a servant



## CHAPTER XVI.

I SHALL not give this letter at full length, but extract from it such passages as will be interesting to the reader, or necessary to the development of my story. Imagine the feelings of surprise and heartfelt gratitude with which I read the following.

“Your description of our sweet Mary’s death has quite unmanned me. I wept like a child, Ruth, while I was reading it; but I deserve to weep for all the suffering I have so thoughtlessly and heartlessly brought upon you. What can I say in excuse for myself? If I plead the influence exercised over me by another, that only makes me out a weak fool, and if I affirm that I acted under an idea that I was really doing you all a service, I confess myself a being

destitute both of judgment and of feeling. Yet you would pity me if you knew what anguish of mind I am enduring now, and confirm the forgiveness you so generously promise to extend to me. Ruth, my poor, patient wife, I solemnly declare that I will never thwart you again in anything. I have been a bad, bad husband for the last few years, but I will endeavour to atone for all. Since I have been in this country (America) I have learnt to look somewhat differently on life, and if I cannot yet go the lengths you do, I can at least promise to become your pupil, and lay aside the foolish prejudices that have clung to me for so many years. One thing I know you will be pleased to hear, and that is that our dear Willie's conduct, during the short time he was with me, did more to reconcile me to your system of education than a hundred elaborate treatises on the subject could have done. The little fellow behaved like a hero, and if it hadn't been for the friend who was with me, and who laughed at my scruples,

I don't believe I should have had the courage to leave him among strangers, or to have resisted, even at the eleventh hour, those quiet tears he strove so manfully to hide. I did not *then* intend to go very far away, but having lost my money, I was induced, in a moment of excitement, to come out with Mr. Leslie and try my fortune in this country, where I should probably have remained another year or two, had not your letter changed all my plans and decided me on coming home immediately."

Here is another and the last extract.

"I hope, my dear Ruth, to be in England by the middle of April. If you will meet me in London, or at the port to which the ship will come, we will immediately proceed to Germany and bring our dear Willie home. I long to be with you both again, and I hope that in time the bitter past may be forgotten, and that I may be enabled to add in some degree to the happiness of that home I have hitherto so little appreciated or enjoyed. Leslie is very anxious that I

should wait till he is ready to sail, but it would keep me from you another month, and therefore I will not do it. He is a strange, wild sort of fellow, with a kind of fascination about him that makes one forget his faults, and causes me to wonder how your friend could have escaped losing her heart to him. But I believe she has done well; and for your sake, my poor Ruth, I wish you had been as prudent some dozen of years ago."

The remainder of the letter contained repeated expressions of regret for the past, and sanguine hopes for the future. It was altogether most kind, most cheering, and eminently calculated to make me forget the gloomy clouds that had so long overshadowed me, in anticipation of the bright sunshine which the coming days seemed to promise.

It was not until the first vivid emotions of joy and gratitude had in some degree subsided, that I remarked one great omission in my husband's letter, and although I felt

entirely convinced that this omission had been unintentional, I was a good deal vexed and disappointed on discovering it. He had forgotten to give me my Willie's address, or even to tell me in what part of Germany he might be found.

It was true, as aunt Katherine said, that a few weeks would restore him to me, and that I must, in any case, have waited my husband's arrival ere I went to Germany. Nevertheless I thought how dearly I should have valued the privilege of writing to my little lonely, forsaken boy, and I knew that every day would appear a month to me while looking for Edward's arrival.

But after all, this was not a matter of vital importance, and it was the only drawback to the great, great joy my husband's letter afforded me—a joy in which aunt Katherine and dear Fanny so warmly sympathised, that we kept a kind of jubilee for many days—the jubilee of grateful hearts, offering up their incense of prayer and praise to the bountiful Giver of all creature good.

It was now the beginning of March, and as I had been urged again and again to visit my cousins at Longhollow, aunt Katherine strongly advised me to take this opportunity of doing so, foreseeing that when once I had my husband and child with me again, I should be little inclined to leave the hallowed precincts of the home their presence would cheer and gladden.

I had enjoyed so much quiet serenity, so much peace of heart while staying with Miss Sinclair, that I was very unwilling to be sent away from her ; but the entreaties of my kind cousins were not to be resisted, and I at length agreed to spend with them the last month prior to my husband's return.

It was a strange and an affecting meeting between the Jerrards and myself, so many eventful years having elapsed since we were together, and time and sorrow having done their work on me in a manner that evidently surprised and shocked the quiet dwellers in that peaceful valley.

"Dear Ruth," said William, with much emotion, after a long, long conversation, in which we had freely discussed the sad and strange episodes in my past history, "is it not true that you have fulfilled my old prediction, and come back weary and worn to the ark of refuge! Ah, my poor cousin, had you been able to look forward a few years ago, how differently would you have shaped your course."

"Yes," I said, "but my mind at present dwells far less on the folly and infatuation of my own conduct, than on that marvellous grace and goodness which has followed me through it, and brought me back to the ark almost in spite of myself. Milly knows how long and how obstinately I rejected the truth."

"And Milly knows," replied my still bright-eyed friend, "how happy she is to welcome you now as a dear sister in Christ, and to forget that there was ever a time when this precious relationship did not exist."

I very soon felt entirely at home with my excellent and warm-hearted cousins, and became interested in all their daily occupations, in their meek-eyed, gentle little girl, and in the various objects that came within the sphere of their activity.

I had also a melancholy pleasure in visiting my own old home, which was at present occupied by a Christian family, who were on terms of intimate friendliness with my cousin William and his wife.

Thus the time passed rapidly and agreeably, and I felt that every day was bringing me nearer to the hour when I should be once more united to my long lost Willie.

Having found, on inquiry, that the ship in which Edward was to sail would come into a seaport remote from London, I made up my mind to proceed to the former place early in April, so that I might be on the spot to welcome my husband, and no time might be lost in taking our passage for the continent.

William Jerrard, at the suggestion of his



wife, offered to accompany me to the place above mentioned, that he might assist me in finding a lodging, and in making every possible inquiry concerning the arrival of my husband's ship.

On the third of April we commenced our long journey, and owing to the heavy rains that had recently fallen, and other inconveniences attending travelling at that time, we did not reach our destination till the eighth of the month, when we were informed that the "Washington" from America was every day expected.

My cousin William secured me a comfortable lodging, and then left me with all my eager and delightful anticipations, making a melody in my heart that drowned his farewell words, and created indifference to everything that was not immediately connected with the subject of these joyous hopes.

## CHAPTER XVII.

DAY after day I walked alone on that bustling and noisy beach, looking over the blue waters and straining my eyes to discover in the far distance, some sign of the anxiously expected vessel. The old mariners, who loitered with their telescopes on the pier, learnt to know me, and to watch for my approach ; and many a long hour have I stood listening to the ocean tales of these weather-beaten seamen, and winning their hearts by the interest I took in the reminiscences of their earlier days.

They all knew it was my husband I waited for so anxiously ; and the sympathy I met with from these rough and untaught sailors, helped me to bear the long suspense much

more patiently than I should otherwise have done.

"A roughish day, ma'am," was the greeting I received one morning from an old man they called Jack, when, after a restless and troubled night, I hurried down to the beach—"but the wind's in our favour at last; and, if the Washington's anywhere near, this gale will blow her in."

"Do you think she is anywhere near?" I asked, with a feeling of reliance on my old friend's judgment, which in this case went rather beyond the bounds of reasonable expectation.

"Can't say, ma'am," he replied, offering me with much politeness the long telescope he had in his hand. "It's likely enough, and there's plenty on the look out."

"I do hope we shall not be disappointed again to-day. This suspense is very trying."

"So it is, ma'am, but it's what sailors' wives gets used to. You may think yourself lucky that you're not a sailor's wife, ma'am."

“I suppose your wife had many an anxious day and night when you went to sea?”

“Ah! poor thing, I believe you, she had indeed. I remember one voyage — .”

But for once the old man was destined to leave his story unfinished, for the sudden cry of “the Washington, the Washington!” from twenty voices on the beach, changed the whole aspect of affairs, and sent me running to the spot whence the welcome sounds proceeded, with a swiftness my companion would have had no chance of keeping up with.

A quarter of an hour sufficed to place the question beyond a doubt; for the gallant ship was by that time fully in sight, and appeared to be approaching the harbour with the speed and grace of a sea-bird skimming the waters.

In the midst of the various expressions of admiration, of congratulation, and of rejoicing from the numerous spectators around me, it suddenly came into my mind to hire a boat, and go out to meet my husband on the

ocean. He had told me to be at the seaport town where the vessel would put in; and would it not be well to go beyond his wishes, to prove to him how sincerely I rejoiced at his return? I cannot say how much of my sudden desire may be placed to the account of the above consideration, or how much to the animation and excitement of the scene; but, at any rate, the union of the two resulted in my seeking the old mariner I had so recently left, and begging him to inquire about a boat for me, in which I might be rowed out to meet the Washington.

The quiet shake of the head, which answered my request, was not very encouraging.

"There's not a boatman would put to sea, ma'am, a morning like this—the wind would be dead against you."

"Do you really mean that the thing could not be done—that a good strong boat would not live in the water?"

"It might live, to be sure," was the cautious reply, "but it wouldn't do much good,

I'm thinking. You'd better wait a bit now, ma'am. The Washington will be in, in less than an hour."

"But I do so much wish to go—my husband would be so pleased. See how those beautiful waves are dancing and sparkling in the sun. They could not harm a living creature."

"Couldn't they!" said my companion, looking as if he thought my ignorance almost too pitiable to be amusing. "Don't you think you should be afraid?"

"I am sure I should not—I should like it above everything. If you can get me a boat, and some good strong men to pull it, I will pay them well—anything at all reasonable that they choose to ask."

The old man smiled in his dry, quiet way—"Money's a great temptation to be sure; but do you expect to do any good by going out, beyond seeing your husband a few minutes sooner?"

By this time I had persuaded myself that my going to meet Edward would be of very

great importance, that it would convince him of the strength of my attachment, and incline him more favourably towards those views he was already beginning to regard with a less prejudiced eye than formerly. In short, I had caught the excitement of the scene and hour, and my judgment was peremptorily silenced by the loud voice of my anxious and expectant heart.

"Yes, indeed," I replied eagerly, "I am quite sure I shall do good by going; I have a strong feeling that I ought to go, and unless you assure me that there would be positive danger, I must still beg you to inquire about a boat for me."

I heard the old man mutter, "Poor young creature!" as he hobbled away to do my errand; and I felt convinced that he would contrive in some way to accomplish it for me.

Ten minutes passed, during which I tried to picture Edward's surprise at seeing me coming out over the rough waves to meet him; and the long, pleasant evening we

should spend in my little parlour overlooking the sea, and the letter I should write that very night to my sweet, sweet Willie, and many other things of a like nature that marvellously delighted my imagination, and kept me from thinking that my messenger tarried on his errand.

At length he came to tell me that a boat was ready, but to advise me once more to give up the project, as the sea was every minute becoming rougher and less manageable, and the men who were going to row declared the scheme to be a mad one.

"Is there danger for them, or for me?" I asked abruptly, "because, if so, of course I give it up."

"And if not ——?" said my friend, beginning I believe to sympathize in some degree with my excitement, and to admire my firmness.

"If not, let us start at once. There is no time to be lost."

"Come along then—this way if you please, ma'am. The men are waiting for us."



“For *us*, my good friend? *You* are not to be of the party, surely?”

“And why not? You’ll be wanting somebody, I guess, to take care of you.”

There was no saying the old man nay. He had made up his mind to see me safe into the ship; and the more I urged him not to trouble himself about me, the more resolved did he appear to have his own way in the matter.

At length, we were fairly off, the six sturdy rowers looking as if they considered me a madwoman, and my aged protector evincing the most anxious care for my comfort and safety.

It was indeed a wild and a stormy sea that morning. In spite of the vigorous exertions of the men, who certainly pulled with right good will, we seemed to be making no progress at all, and the huge waves that every minute beat over our boat would no doubt have alarmed me in spite of my excitement, had not the calm face of the old mariner and his few encouraging words

quieted my rising fears, and given me courage to look steadily on the gallant vessel that was approaching us.

It soon became evident that we were seen by those on deck, for faint cheers were borne to us over the water, and I fancied I saw white handkerchiefs waving in the air. A little more battling with the strong billows of the angry ocean, and our brave boat was near enough for us to distinguish the mass of human forms that were crowded on the ship's deck, and to hear without difficulty the loud and hearty cheers that encouraged our efforts, and animated the fearless rowers into almost superhuman strength.

Now it was that my excitement became so intense that large tears poured in showers down my face, and every limb, though I was burning hot, trembled and shook as if an ague fit had seized me. Now it was that, throwing off the cloak the old seaman had wrapped round me, I insisted on standing up, and trying amongst that mass of forms, to distinguish the one I sought so anxiously.

If Edward were not there, if anything had prevented him from sailing?—Oh I dared not think of it—my Willie, my Willie, thy mother's heart must find thee soon, or break.

My excitement and agitation as we neared the vessel were not unshared by those around me. On more than one rough face I saw a bright tear glittering; from more than one rough voice came an entreaty that I would not cry so. But it was all of no use, when the deep fountains of emotion had been unlocked, and suspense and uncertainty were added to the other unquiet feelings natural to the occasion.

Assuredly Edward was not amongst the animated party on deck—of that I was now thoroughly persuaded; and by the time our little boat was under the huge ship's side, I was powerless to utter a word, or to do more than submit passively to the directions of those around me.

"Who is it, what is it, who is wanted?" were the eager and rapid questions that assailed my ears, as the ropes were lowered

to attach our boat to the vessel, and the weary rowers threw down their oars and became apparently interested wholly in what was going on.

It was a moment of agonizing and thrilling excitement to me, when my old friend, raising his gruff voice, asked whether there was a Mr. Sinclair on board, and requested if there was, that he might be told to come forward.

I see the scene vividly before me now, just as, with the dark waves rolling around me, I saw it then. I see a rapid exchange of looks amongst several of the persons above, I see a short stout man lean over the vessel's side, and I hear a voice that matched the figure saying in the calmest and most business-like tone—

“Edward Sinclair, passenger in this ship from New York, died last night at eleven o'clock. Supposed to be disease of the heart. Let the lady be hoisted up, and taken into the cabin.”

How they got me up the ship's side I

never knew ; for from the moment the words I have recorded fell upon my ear, I remained in a state of unconsciousness, until the Washington had entered the harbour.

On my recovery, I found that poor old Jack (my only friend here) had secured a coach for me, in which, more like a dead than a living being, I was conveyed to my solitary lodging, and left to the dreary contemplation of the new and terrible affliction which had so suddenly burst upon me.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

A FORTNIGHT had passed since the arrival of the Washington ; a fortnight of bitter and ceaseless mourning, which none can thoroughly understand but those who have been bereaved under circumstances similar to mine. I have endeavoured to make it apparent in the course of this history, how many sad occasions I had for lamenting my union with an unbeliever ; and none who have entered into my various sufferings can suppose that these lamentations were either causeless or insincere. Nevertheless, I am bound to state that it was not till death had interposed an eternal barrier between my husband and myself, that I felt to its full extent what it was I had done.

All who have had to mourn the loss of friends or relations must be aware how prone the mind is to forget the faults or unkindnesses of those who are gone, and to dwell only on their amiable and endearing qualities. This was in a striking degree the case with me; so that all the years of cold estrangement between my husband and myself, all his heartlessness with regard to my Willie, were obliterated from my memory as I recalled the past; while every kind word or deed, every tone, or glance of affection, came before me with ten times its original power, and heaped coals of fire on my head.

We were parted now—we who had loved so fondly; we who had once thought it the hardest of earth's trials to be separated for a single day; we who, in our days of romance and foolishness, had talked of sharing the same grave, and of being even in death united!—We were parted, and what reasonable hope had I that our parting was not for ever?

True, my poor husband had spoken in his

letter of becoming my pupil on his return, of striving to take an interest in the things which belonged to his peace ; but I could not shut my eyes to the fact that there appeared more of the repentant husband anxious to please the wife he had injured, than of the awakened sinner seeking to escape the wrath of God, in these professions.

We were parted. The convenient season, for which he waited, had not been granted him. Never more might friendly warning reach his ear ; never more might earnest preaching assail his heart ; and never more might prayer be breathed to Heaven for the salvation of the soul whose doom was irrevocably fixed.

This is an awful thought concerning any human being—concerning a stranger even, of whom we have casually heard—but when it relates to a beloved friend, to a wife, to a husband, to a parent, or to a child—oh, what human woe can match it ?

But in the case of a husband or a wife, God has mercifully given his children a com-



mandment which, if they obey it, will preserve them from so keen a sorrow.

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness?”

If the children of God wilfully disobey this command, then must they expect to suffer as I have suffered; and well will it be for them, if the light in their own souls become not quenched by its contact with the darkness they are embracing.

I had been all alone during the fortnight I have spoken of; for it was several days before I had strength to write to anybody, and letters were conveyed less speedily from place to place at that time than they are at present. But, as soon as it was possible to make arrangements for doing so, my cousin William came to me, and undertook, at my earnest request, to procure the papers of my poor husband, and examine their contents.

There were many matters I felt anxious to be informed about; but above all I wanted

my Willie's address, that I might bring him home to me, and have his sympathy and love to console me under my new bereavement.

William Jerrard had spent the first evening of his arrival with me, doing all in his power to calm my agitated spirits, and to lead me to that Rock where the Christian is privileged, under every circumstance, to seek shelter from the storms of life.

His gentle and earnest admonitions had not been without effect; and, after a quieter night than I had yet enjoyed, I awoke the following morning refreshed and strengthened, and looking anxiously for William's arrival with my husband's papers, which he was to obtain and bring to me as early as possible.

About twelve o'clock he came in, and the first glance at his countenance told me there was something wrong. I had no heart to speak, but it was unnecessary, for he sat down beside me and began immediately.

"My dear Ruth, it is a great grief to me to be the bearer of bad news. I have care-

fully examined the very few letters and papers that Mr. Sinclair's desk contained, and the whole of these relate to some property which it appears he had previously transmitted to England. There is neither letter, paper, nor memorandum of any kind referring to your boy."

I could not believe that I had heard aright. It seemed impossible to me that my poor sick heart could bear more than it had already borne. I was willing to think my cousin had committed some mistake, that his search had been a hasty and insufficient one—anything, in short, but that the barrier which separated me from my Willie stood as firm and immoveable as it had ever done.

"Are you sure, quite sure that there is nothing to be found?" I said, after a long pause, during which my cousin had held my hand and evinced the deepest sympathy with my distress.

"I would not have pained you, Ruth, unnecessarily," replied William, in a tone that deprived me of my last hope, and seemed to

me like the herald of something worse than death. "But we must think now of what is next to be done."

"What *can* be done?" I asked, with a look that probably expressed some small portion of the despair I felt, and caused William to turn his face abruptly towards the window, and remain silent for more than a minute after I had spoken.

The kind heart bled for the sufferings of mine; but oh, he had never been deprived of a beloved child, he had never had the desire of his eyes stolen from him, he had never gone through days and nights, and weeks and months of cruel suspense and uncertainty—what could he, in reality, understand of such a woe as this woe?

"What can be done, William?" I repeated presently—and then he turned towards me again, and said with his usual calmness.

"We must advertise in the German newspapers, offering a handsome reward to any one who can give information of the child, or of the school at which he was placed. If

it is stated that the father is dead, they' will no longer have an object in keeping your son from you."

"Oh then, let this be done at once, William. When can you see about it?"

"Not until I go to London, I fear. You must exercise the grace of patience a little longer."

A sudden thought struck me. "Mr. Leslie, that bad man of whom I have told you," I said, "is of course acquainted with my Willie's address. Edward said he would sail from America in the next ship after the Washington. Had I not better wait here until it arrives, and demand an interview with him on his landing?"

"I think, my dear Ruth, your staying here would be quite useless," he replied. "In the first place, it is not certain that the vessel will come to this port at all; and in the second place, from what you have told me about Mr. Leslie, I am of opinion that it would be desirable for me to see him instead of you."

“ He cannot refuse to give any information he possesses—can he, William ?”

“ He certainly would be acting a most base and dishonourable part in doing so ; —but if he chooses to plead ignorance, there is no human authority that can compel him to speak.”

“ Still, this is the best chance we have, is it not ?”

“ Decidedly. I have very little fear of being able to manage him. In the mean time, what will you do yourself, Ruth ?”

“ I should like to go to Germany, and begin making enquiries, I think.”

“ You are not in a state of health to travel alone at present. Come home with me now. Milly will be delighted to have you again ; and after I have seen this Mr. Leslie, you can start for Germany as soon as you like, and take Miss Cleve as a travelling companion.”

Having no reasonable objections to make to my cousin’s proposal, although I should greatly have preferred going to Germany at once, I consented to place myself under his

care, until Mr. Leslie's arrival should further decide my plans. And the following day we set out for William's home at Longhollow.

Of the next month, I have little to say, but that my deep and settled grief received all the alleviation of which it was susceptible, in the kindness and affection of the dear friends with whom I was staying. They saw that the wave upon wave of heart disappointment was trying my faith severely, and their most earnest efforts were directed to the task of leading my wearied mind to trust in the guiding Hand, even when my path was compassed about with clouds and darkness.

Aunt Katherine's letters, however, had a more salutary effect upon me than anything else. She did not entreat or implore me to receive the chastening meekly, and to believe that it would be for my ultimate good; but she reminded me of my solemn responsibilities as a child of God, and of the positive sin my soul would incur by doubting the wisdom of His decrees.

There was, too, one other source from which

I was graciously permitted to draw comfort and courage in this hour of exceeding trial. It was from that sweet letter written to me by my beloved Willie on the eve of his departure from home, in which he so touchingly insisted on the great truth that "God is Love," no less when He causes sorrow than when He causes joy.

Oh! how often was that old, worn letter taken from its hiding-place, and read with blinding tears; and how often was its perusal followed by sensations of peace and hope that, even as transient gleams of light, were most welcome and precious to my soul.

A short time before the next American ship was expected, my cousin William took me to London, and committed me to the care of Miss Sinclair, while he proceeded to the arrangement of some pecuniary matters for me, which my husband's sudden death had left in much confusion.

Aunt Katherine and Fanny were both pleased at my arrival, and in their society I was enabled to throw off more of my dejection than I had yet succeeded in doing, and



to look forward with sanguine expectation to the result of William Jerrard's interview with Mr. Leslie.

But how little do we know of His ways whose name is 'Wonderful;' how totally incapable are the wisest amongst us of judging of the degree of chastening necessary for purifying and refining the soul that is to be made "meet for the kingdom of Heaven."

One morning, when I had been about a week with aunt Katherine, as Fanny and myself were employed in some household work, it was suddenly announced to me that my cousin William waited to speak to me in the parlour.

"How pale you are," said my companion, as I threw down the duster I had in my hand, and prepared to leave the room; "I don't suppose Mr. Jerrard brings you any news of importance yet."

"I think—I feel sure he *does*," I replied, hurrying as fast as my trembling limbs would permit to the room where my cousin was expecting me.

"Are you well, dear Ruth?" said William

with unusual solicitude, as he took my extended hand, and led me to a chair beside the one he had been occupying.

"Quite well," I replied faintly, "and now whatever you have to communicate, do not keep me in suspense. You have seen Mr. Leslie?"

"I have not."

"Oh, then there is still hope!" I exclaimed with a sigh of relief, that came from the very depths of my heart. "I feared from your grave countenance that the ship had arrived, and that your interview had been unsuccessful."

"The ship has arrived, dear Ruth. It came in yesterday."

"Then what is the matter, William? Oh! have mercy on me, and tell me all at once."

"Mr. Leslie was not amongst the passengers, and I have ascertained that he sailed in the Washington at the same time with your husband."

I neither wept nor fainted; but my heart seemed turned to stone, and the only cry

that went up from its frozen springs was the mournful cry of Job. "Let the day perish wherein I was born—Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it."

My Willie, my Willie, where art thou? Why may not some spirit instinct guide me to the spot where thy lonely home has been appointed thee! Oh, that love should be so strong and mighty to feel, so weak and powerless to find!

## CHAPTER XIX.

OUR only hope now rested on the advertisements, for although I was still determined to go to Germany, and begin a personal search, I felt how slight a chance there was of its being rewarded with success, not only on account of my total ignorance concerning the locality which held my treasure, but because I knew nothing of the German language, and had no friend who was better instructed in this matter than myself.

Miss Sinclair persuaded me to remain with her till the summer was over, and as she was willing to accept my assistance in her own arduous labours, and even assured me that I was of real service to her, I felt that it was better for me to be here

than elsewhere, although no indulgence in sorrowing was permitted, and work, work, work, was the order of every day.

It was at this time that I first began to derive true enjoyment,—an enjoyment that was perfect in itself and abstracted from every other feeling—in labouring in the cause of Christ. I do not mean that my mind ever lost, for a single hour, the keen consciousness of past or present afflictions, but simply that the powerful interest, with which my work inspired me, was like a pure stream of water in the desert, from which the wearied and heart-sick traveller might drink at any moment and be refreshed.

“Go on,” aunt Katherine used to say, in her cheerful, encouraging tones, “work as if everything depended solely on the efforts you are making, and at the same time pray as if everything depended solely on your prayers. For though we know that, after all, it is the blessing of God which alone can crown the labours of His people with success, still He wills that we

should work with all our might, and He has said that He will be inquired of concerning the gifts and mercies he has to bestow upon us."

What an example too I had before me. What zeal, what earnestness, what untiring activity—surely it would have been inexcusable if I had not caught some of the spirit of that admirable woman who adorned the doctrine of her Lord and Saviour in all things.

Amongst the many, many mercies that I have to look back upon, the gift of this friend stands apart from every other, as a mercy that to the day of my death will demand my warmest, loudest songs of praise to Him who knew the weakness of my character and so skilfully provided for its instruction and discipline.

Well was it for me that aunt Katherine stood by when my next disappointment fell upon me, when, in answer to the advertisements which had at length caught the eye of my Willie's guardians, I received the

startling intelligence that he had been withdrawn from their protection some months ago, by the gentleman who had been with Mr. Sinclair when the child was brought to school. On a comparison of dates, we found that this abduction must have occurred the very week after the arrival of the Washington.

And what was to be done now? Alas, I had grown almost weary of this question—and yet how could I endure the thought that my dove, my pure, innocent dove had fallen into the tiger's clutches—that he might be exposed to every evil influence, every corrupting example, every fearful snare that a wolf from the den of Satan, could contrive to entrap a lamb from the fold of Christ.

Yes, this was indeed worse, far worse than all that had come before it, but aunt Katherine had a God to tell of who could stop the mouth of lions, who could quench the violence of fire, who could calm the stormiest passions of men, and who could

preserve *His own*, uninjured, even in the midst of the deep.

Was this God powerless to protect a "little one," who believed on His name, from the devices of a man who was governed only by the impulses of a passionate and worldly heart?

Ah, let me trust Him still—let me cleave to the Rock that is higher than I, let me hold tightly to His hand though I see it not in the darkness. For what other hope, what other refuge, what other guide is left me?

"Ah when the infinite burden of life descendeth upon us,  
Crushes to earth our hope—and under the earth, in the  
grave yard,  
Then it is well to pray unto God—for his sorrowing  
children  
Turns he ne'er from the door, but He heals, and helps,  
and consoles them."

It was indeed a great and important consolation to me when on visiting, that autumn, the school where my Willie had been placed, I heard his name spoken on



all sides in accents of approbation and affection, and discovered that he had been as remarkable for his simple piety, as for his industry and obedience in those matters connected with the every day duties he had to perform.

Earnestly and gratefully did I bless my Father, who had heard the mother's prayer, for this sweet encouragement to my faith, and no less earnestly did I ask for patience to wait His time in the further dissipating of those dark clouds, which still kept the sunshine from my path.

It would be long and tedious to dwell on all the efforts that were made, by me and for me, to discover whither Mr. Leslie had taken my child, or what could have been his object in this wicked theft. The few friends he had in England declared their total ignorance of his movements, and seemed unwilling to claim acquaintance with a man who could act as he had done.

Sometimes, by dint of unnumbered advertisements, and the most minute inquiries

from place to place, I believed that I had obtained a clue that might lead to his discovery, but on following it up, which I always did whatever dangers or inconveniences it involved, disappointment was the only result, and I returned from my fruitless journey weary in body, and more than wearied in mind.

This went on, not for days, or weeks, or months even—but for years! for years, in which the ceaseless strife of soul told cruelly on the fragile human frame, for years in which the light faded from the eye, the hair became streaked with silver, the roundness departed from the cheek, and scarcely a trace remained by which the world might recognize the young and happy mother who had romped with her children in the old orchard at Ashvale, and seemed as much a child as they.

During all this time I had never once returned to my former home. Aunt Katherine had been there, and Fanny had been there, but I said I had no time to go

myself, and perhaps this might have been one reason—though my aching heart was conscious of another of greater weights which it was needless to drag on all occasions, from its hiding place to exhibit to the world.

I was not always alone in my wanderings. For the first two or three years Fanny was my constant companion, but at the end of that time she married with Miss Sinclair's full consent and approbation, and thenceforth I had to seek another friend.

A friend so congenial to me as Fanny, I never found, but as her place was occasionally supplied by Mrs. Linley, and occasionally by one of my cousin William's sisters, I felt her loss somewhat less than I should otherwise have done.

Mrs. Linley had never quite got over her own severe affliction—her spirits lacked the buoyancy which I had so admired in Fanny's, and the quiet cheerfulness which distinguished aunt Katherine's; nevertheless she was very far from yielding to despondency, and I believe made greater effort

to shake off every appearance of gloom when she was with me, than at any other time.

At length, however, her failing health obliged her to give up travelling, and then I generally managed to spend a month or two of every year at the Abbey, and to return, in care and affection, the debt I owed this kind and unselfish friend.

I was with her during her last illness which came on rather suddenly, and remained, at Mrs. Linley's earnest request, to close her eyes, and to receive her parting words of gratitude for her release and of faith in that loving Saviour through whose merits she knew her sins had been forgiven, and a mansion purchased for her in her Father's house.

Thus there was another gone before me to take possession of the building not made with hands, the house eternal in the heavens—and I felt sometimes as if I only wanted to press my Willie to my heart once more, and then to follow those who were already safe in the land of everlasting rest.

I felt this very powerfully the day after poor Mrs. Linley's funeral, when, for the last time, I walked through the desolate house, and remembered the "years of long ago" with which the old Abbey was connected—remembered the husband and wife in all their reckless gaiety and determination to enjoy the world—remembered my own husband in all his fascination and devotion to myself, and his contempt for the quiet in the land. Where were they all now? I looked around me, but no voice, no sound broke the dreary stillness in which I moved. Where were they all now? The dark trees waved before the windows, the white grave-stones in the churchyard gleamed coldly in the sunshine, but no voice, save the rustling leaves broke upon my ear! Where were they all now?

It was indeed a solemn question, and as I fell on my knees, weeping bitter tears, I felt as if I could bear on my heart the whole human race, praying that every one now living might die the death of the righteous,

and have a sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection in the day of Christ's appearing.

\* \* \* \*

And so the years sped on, the long, sad years of alternate hope and disappointment, the long sad years that took with them youth and joyousness, the long sad years that left behind them broader and deeper the gloom and the shadow.

The long, sad years, of a lonely, childless existence, brightened now only by the hope of soon meeting my beloved ones in the land that knows no loss, no death, no change!

I had done with wandering at last. It seemed to me that a voice said, 'Go home!' I hoped the voice had a double meaning, but I was willing to obey its literal signification, and to return to the spot where my Mary rested, there to await my own summons in quietness and peace.

"I think you have judged wisely," said aunt Katherine, when I communicated to her my intention, "I am glad of it, particularly as *I* am just about to begin the wandering life you have relinquished."

"You, aunt Katherine—whatever do you mean?"

"That when the young women grow old, it is time for the old ones to grow young," she replied cheerfully, "and therefore, as Fanny can take my duties here, and there is abundance of missionary work abroad, I am going to venture on a trip to America."

This was all the explanation my repeated questions obtained, and I bade aunt Katherine farewell with a weary heart, feeling how slight a chance there was of our ever meeting again on this side eternity.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE first evening of my arrival at Ashvale is deeply imprinted on my memory. It was in the early part of autumn, just when the leaves are beginning to grow "thin and sere," and the whole face of nature to put on its sober, matron garb which prepares us for the approach of winter. I had never since the days of lighthearted youth been able to resist the melancholy influences that prevail during the autumn months, and now, when storm had followed upon storm, when all the billows and waves of disappointment and trouble had gone over me, when I was returning desolate and alone to my once happy home, was it likely that I should be more successful?

My old nurse still remained the solitary



occupant of the otherwise deserted house, and after a brief interview with her (for my heart had no language for its sadness to-night) I walked out into the garden, hoping to gain strength for talking with this faithful and attached servant more fully on the morrow.

Who does not know what it is to return to a beloved home after long years of absence, and to seek out with aching heart, every dear and familiar object that memory has kept preserved amongst its sacred relics ! Who does not know what it is to look upon the unchanged scenes of by-gone days, and to compare them wonderingly with the vast change which time has wrought in the outer and the inner life of the breathing form that is standing once more amongst them !

But that which would be sad for all, was doubly sad, was agonizing for me. Of those dear ones whose looks and tones of fond affection I missed so cruelly, one was sleeping in the churchyard, and the other was—where ? An echo answers, where ?

But here, full in my sight, visible through

the thickly falling tears I sought not to restrain, were the trees and shrubs my children's hands had planted. They were all fair and flourishing, and seemed to say to me, as their green branches waved in the evening breeze: "Behold, how *we* have grown and thriven, without human care or culture, and then think of those fairy blossoms on which you deemed a life's labour well bestowed."

Yes, but then there is another lesson I will learn from the perfect growth and vigour of these gently waving trees. I will learn how the great Father of the universe watches over all, and to what beauty and perfection He can bring the smallest flower in His own fair garden, even though that flower be never watched or noticed by any human eye.

It might be that in this world I should never look upon my Willie again, but while the One Great Eye of Love was bent upon him, what mattered it (as far as the perfecting of his nature was concerned) whether this fond and yearning desire of my heart, were granted me or not!

Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep !

Here was my consolation, here was my hope, and everything that tended to remind me of so blessed a promise was more welcome to my weary soul than streams of water to the thirsty ground.

From the garden I wandered into the orchard, the cool green orchard, undisturbed now by shouts of childish merriment, and looking like a little harbour of refuge in the midst of a stormy world.

I came to the old walnut tree where I had first seen Bessie Graham, and heard her sing that touching melody, which had taught me to Whom her pure heart was devoted. I wondered how time had dealt with her, during the years of my troubled pilgrimages, and whether, like myself, she was longing for the wings of a dove, that she might flee away and be at rest.

But no, she had a husband to walk beside her in the narrow path, a companion to share her griefs, and to participate in her joys. It

must all be well with my early friend, both as to her present peace and her future prospects.

Thinking thus, and comparing (not I hope with bitterness) her lot with mine, I walked on as the moon was now rising till I came beneath an open window on the ground floor of my neighbour's house. They knew nothing of my arrival, as I had taken even my old nurse by surprise, and I had no intention of betraying my vicinity till I had ascertained what members of the family still remained here, and whether they would desire to resume our former terms of intimacy.

But hark! there, at least, is a familiar voice, there too, are well remembered words. Had all the past rolled back, and brought again before me the evening on which my thoughts had just been dwelling? or was Bessie indeed so near me, an inmate once more of the happy home in which I had first learned to know and love her? How sweetly on the still bright air, rose the low and dreamy melody:

“Bend, bend the knee,  
The day’s long toil and trouble now are past ;  
Whom should we seek at this still hour but Thee  
Father—at last.”

Unconscious of an auditor, the gentle singer continued, until she arrived at the third stanza. Then there was an unmistakeable faltering of the voice, and at the words :

“When pleading for the loved one far away,”

a burst of heart-wrung tears concluded the attempt, and from my place of observation I saw what appeared to me a shadow of the Bessie Graham of former days, clothed in a widow’s sable weeds, rise abruptly from her seat, and kneel (with face buried in her hands), beside the chair she had so hastily quitted.

Poor Bessie ! this then was what time had done for her. This was the manner in which the “love not” of life’s sad volume had been made intelligible to her soul ; and I no longer doubted as to whether she was ready to flee away and be rest.

The next day our long suspended intimacy was renewed with mutual delight, and I soon

found that my heavenly Father was about to show me one more instance of the marvellous power of sanctifying grace upon a human heart. A human heart bleeding under the bitterest of earthly sorrows, yet acknowledging not only the justice but the kindness of the hand that had thus prostrated it. Bessie, the widowed Bessie was once again, if not the sunbeam in her family, at least the support and guide of all the younger members of it, the friend and counsellor of the elder branches, and a bright example to the whole. Her health was far from what it had been, and the marks of premature age were stamped upon the fair and placid brow. But the gentle, holy look still shone upon the face, imparting to it that spiritual loveliness over which time can have no power.

To me, her society was a rich and priceless blessing, the greatest perhaps that, under existing circumstances, I could have obtained, and the only drawback I experienced to this pure enjoyment, was the fear that she too, like all the rest, would go home before

me, and leave another blank in my nearly desolate heart.

Every night, while the weather permitted, I crept to my old hiding place in the orchard, and listened to Bessie's hymn. She would only sing it when quite alone, because it had been her husband's favourite, and she had not yet succeeded in getting through it without that deep emotion which a highly sensitive conscience made her deem an evidence of lingering rebellion to the will of Heaven.

I never betrayed having listened secretly, but I continued doing so with ever increasing pleasure, not only because the words of this sweet hymn had a powerful attraction for me, but because I often brought back from my lonely ramble a lesson of patience and self-control that, for days after, rested like dews of Heaven upon my heart.

In the winter, Bessie's health declined rapidly, and a general fear prevailed that she would not rally again. But the united prayers of a devoted family were graciously heard on her behalf, and the drooping widow

renewed once more her works and her labour of love amongst her own people.

Another bright summer passed by, and brought no change of importance either to the Grahams or to myself, but an unusually severe winter again told upon poor Bessie's wasted strength, and when the first breath of spring blew upon her faded cheek we knew, and she knew, that the summons home could not be far distant.

I was sitting alone with her one day when she said, abruptly :

"I have long had a strong desire, dear friend, to see you fully blessed before I die. I know that you are blessed in the love of that Saviour who will never leave you nor forsake you, but I would fain witness the perfecting of your earthly happiness too, and receive an answer to the prayers I have offered up on your behalf."

"May God bless you abundantly for these prayers, dear Bessie," I replied, "but my only hope now is, to meet you all in heaven."

"We shall assuredly meet in heaven,



Ruth—but God has not forbidden us to seek and desire each other's temporal happiness as well. It is, I am persuaded, owing only to our 'little faith,' that we obtain so few of the things for which we pray. I have been thinking much to-day of that striking word which our Lord spoke to his disciples—'If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye should be able to say unto this mountain, remove hence, and be ye cast into the sea, and it should be done unto you!'"

Some days after this, Bessie felt so much better, that she entreated—the evening being unusually mild and beautiful—to be carried into the orchard and laid on her invalid couch beneath one of the trees. This desire, though opposed at first, was finally complied with, and, as usual, I joined the quiet circle, and was received with marked kindness and affection by my dying friend.

We had been assembled about half an hour, when a servant came from the Graham's house, and announced a visitor who had been all day expected. Bessie did not

feel inclined to see a stranger, so the rest of the family returned with the messenger, and the widow and myself were left alone together.

"You are very happy, Bessie," I said abruptly, after a long, silent contemplation of her serene and peace-breathing aspect.

"You made just the same remark once before," she replied with emotion, "when I was about to enter upon a new career, and exchange the insignificance of girlhood for the dignity and responsibility of matron life. And I was happy at that time, very happy, because I looked forward to long years of peace and comfort with him to whom I had given my warmest earthly affections. But how is it now? shall I not soon enter upon an immortality of blessedness, such a blessedness as man's heart hath never been able to conceive? Shall I not soon exchange the pains, the cares and the temptations of this mortal life, for the white robe and the palm, for the everlasting crown of righteousness, purchased for me by the Saviour I have so

imperfectly served and followed? And shall I not at the same time be reunited to the husband from whom I parted with such bitter grief on earth? Oh, dearest Ruth, should I not be happier, far happier now!"

"Yes," I said, "it must be indeed a blessed and a glorious thing to feel that heaven is opening to you. —that you have fought and conquered in the hard battle of life, and that angels are already holding the crown that shall encircle your brow through the endless ages of eternity. Look, Bessie, how gloriously the sun is setting to-night, attended by those radiant and graceful floating clouds. I can fancy that in like manner the ministering spirits of God will wait on your departure from the world, and bear you triumphantly to the presence of your Saviour, and the company of just men made perfect."

"I do not think, Ruth, that I shall ever look upon another sunset. A thousand signs visible to my eyes alone, warn me of approaching death. There is but one thing now that I care to wait for, and I know that

this will come, and that it will not tarry. Dear friend, be comforted, for what I have asked for you I have asked *believing that I shall receive.*"

A strange emotion came over me as Bessie spoke, a sudden trembling that was not of fear, but of some deep and hidden hope that appeared to have been re-created in this moment of heart-thrilling excitement. I laid my hand on Bessie's arm, I looked up at the brightly glowing clouds, and then I bowed my head, and entreated, with every power of my soul, that the mystery of these novel sensations might be revealed to me.

After the interval of a few minutes, during which no sound had broken the profound quiet around us, I was suddenly startled by hearing a rustling in the long grass, as though firm and rapid footsteps were approaching.

"It is a stranger," said Bessie, "and she is seeking you."

In another instant I was holding dear aunt Katherine in my arms, and trying

earnestly to read the unusual expression of her slightly altered face.

“When did you arrive in England? where have you been? what have you done?” were questions that followed each other in almost breathless succession; for the tumult in my mind rendered it impossible for me to speak quietly, and I felt almost certain that aunt Katherine had something of importance to tell.

“Not here,” she said at length, “but come into the house and I will try to satisfy your curiosity.”

I asked no more questions—the power of speech seemed gone from me; my knees shook so that I could not stand alone, and tightly grasping the supporting arm that was offered, I accompanied Miss Sinclair towards the house.

In the passage that led to the drawing-room she suddenly stopped.

“You wish to know when I arrived in England, where I have been, and what I have done. I will not keep you in suspense.

I arrived in England four days ago ; I have been, as I told you before, to America ; my object was to find a certain lost sheep to whose wanderings I believed I had obtained a clue. Your third question shall be answered by and bye. I am going to take off my bonnet, and will join you in the drawing-room, presently."

With these words she opened the door, and left me to enter the room alone.

I am quite sure that the dizziness of my brain prevented me from having a clear perception of what was about to take place, when Miss Sinclair so abruptly quitted my side ; but as I mechanically, or rather acting on some secret impulse, raised my head and looked tremblingly around, a slight youthful form bounded from a dark corner of the room. A pair of soft blue eyes were lifted yearningly to mine, a voice, whose accents had never ceased to echo in my heart, uttered tremblingly the sweet word " Mother ;" and my son, my Willie, my long lost idol, rested on my bosom once more.

## CHAPTER XXI.

OH that long, long, rapturous evening!  
How shall I find calm words—befitting the  
calm old woman who writes them—in which  
to describe the overflowing happiness that a  
pitying Father had at length granted me, in  
a reunion with my worshipped child.

Child indeed no longer; but oh! how  
passing strange it seemed to press to my  
heart a tall handsome youth, instead of the  
blue eyed boy, with locks of gold, from whom  
I had been so cruelly parted. How strange  
it seemed to listen to the full, mellow tones  
of an almost manly voice, instead of to the  
pretty, silvery, childish accents that had  
mingled with my dreams for years.

Could it indeed, after all, be my own  
Willie, the long lost found, the dead restored

to life, the wept through weary days and sleepless nights given back again to the nearly broken heart? Ah yes—that one word “mother” had banished every doubt, and convinced me that the speaker of it was indeed and in truth my own, own precious child.

This was happiness. This was the full cup sparkling with life’s purest nectar, not only raised to my longing lips, but given me to drink draught by draught, while feeling and ensation should remain.

I had often read that proverb—“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh it is as a tree of life.” I had read it, I say, and of late years comprehended too well the meaning conveyed in the first clause; but never till now had my mind taken in the striking and beautiful figure set forth in the concluding words, or known how it was that a fulfilled desire could be as a tree of life.

Ah! but I knew it now, I felt it in my inmost soul—felt too that I would even live



year within the least sickness or pain, as there again the rare and delicate bird from such a tree of life.

I could linger long on the description of my first transporting machine: the poor grovel wretch of roosting birds and snakes would have lived for a little while on the surface and sunshine that followed: but I have first to relate how my dove was preserved amidst the snares and perils of an ungodly world, and brought back without a single stain on its pure and snowy wings.

Mr. Leslie, having succeeded easily in his purpose of removing Willie from the school where his father had placed him, conceived next the daring project of taking the child to America, and of bringing him up as his own son. As far as could be ascertained, he had only two objects in this design—the first to be revenged on myself and Fanny, the second to gratify the very strong fancy he had imbibed for the noble little fellow whose conduct, under the trying circumstances in which he had been placed, appeared


to have made a singular impression on Mr. Leslie's undisciplined mind.

With a view of attaching the child exclusively to himself, and of securing his ready acquiescence in any views he might hereafter form for him, this wholly unscrupulous man communicated to my poor, forsaken boy, (about a month after he had put on mourning for his father) the startling intelligence that all his relations were dead, and that he (Mr. Leslie) had been appointed his guardian and protector. My beloved Willie forbore to dwell on the bitter anguish his young and tender heart experienced at these cruel tidings, but he assured me that even then he sorrowed not as one without hope, because he knew we must be all safe in heaven, and trusted that God would soon call him to rejoin us there.

For the first year or two after their arrival in America, Mr. Leslie paid the most exemplary attention to his youthful charge, giving him many advantages in the way of education, and using every means to win his confidence and affection.

But Willie could not like him—he was so different to the friends he had been accustomed to, he had so few qualities calculated to inspire esteem—and my sweet, truthful boy being unable to feign an attachment he did not feel, Mr. Leslie soon grew weary of his first devotion, and by degrees left the desolate and melancholy child to get on as he could, without bestowing further notice on him than was included in an occasional remark on his ingratitude and coldness, or the expression of a wish that he had not brought him out to America.

As far as personal comforts went, however, my Willie had still nothing to complain of, as Mr. Leslie lived luxuriously himself, and was willing that all about him should share in his prosperity. He likewise permitted the child to have free access to his books, such as they were, and thus my dear boy acquired a passion for reading which might, from its present desultory nature, have had an unfortunate influence upon his mind, but for those early lessons of sound piety which



acted as a charm against all the witchcraft of modern science and literature.

But by and bye there came a change to this smooth and easy kind of life which was not without its attractions for a dreamy, imaginative boy like my Willie. A sudden reverse of fortune occurred to Mr. Leslie; carriages, horses, furniture, books, were all sold, and he had to retire with his adopted son to a very humble home in another part of the country, where Willie was obliged to act in the capacity of a servant to his now irritable and ungracious protector, and where every advantage in the way of reading and instruction was entirely cut off.

This went on till Mr. Leslie, at the end of about two years from the time of his misfortunes, met with an accident which finally terminated in death. Thus my Willie found himself without money, without friends, and without a home in a strange land. For the small house Mr. Leslie occupied had been a hired one, and all the personal property he left was insufficient to pay the rent, and other debts he had contracted.

In this emergency, however, the friendless found a friend. Not far from the village where Mr. Leslie had resided there happened to be stationed for a short time a devoted minister of the gospel, who, hearing of my Willie's situation, offered him a home, with such instruction as he might have leisure and opportunity to give.

Thus my precious boy became a dweller in the tents of Israel, experiencing the love and faithfulness of that God who "setteth the desolate in families," and whose angel "encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."

By the providential arrangement of this same blessed God, it came to pass that my Willie's new guardian wrote an account of the singular circumstances which had led to his undertaking so important a charge to a missionary friend in England. This friend, after the lapse of three years, mentioned the circumstance casually to the old clergyman whom I have before spoken of as an acquaintance of Miss Sinclair. No names,

however, had in either case been specified, and it was only with an uncertain hope that aunt Katherine, on hearing the story, resolved to go herself across the Atlantic, and see both the guardian and his ward.

On her arrival, she found to her great disappointment that the excellent minister had left his former residence, and was travelling as an itinerant preacher from place to place, amongst the remote villages of northern America. By dint of extraordinary efforts, she at length succeeded in tracing the footsteps of this zealous servant of Christ; and her labours and her prayers were finally rewarded, as has been seen, with the most signal success and blessing.

On the great happiness my Willie experienced at recognizing aunt Katherine, and hearing that his mother was still alive, he had no objection to dwell; and oh! how sweet it was to offer up *together* our heartfelt thanks and praises to that gracious God who had turned our long night of weeping into a morning of such pure and sacred joy!

And so we were once more united, my blue-eyed boy, my first-born child, my precious Willie and myself. Now I could go again, and stand beside the little grave in the churchyard, and, with a warm hand locked in mine, recall every circumstance attending our sweet Mary's death, and wipe away the tears that fell from the brother's eyes, as he listened with his heart as well as with his ear to the touching story.

Now too I could visit every spot endeared by old associations, and go over with my Willie every tender reminiscence of the days long past. Now too I could look back, without shuddering, to the dreary wilderness through which I had been led, and acknowledge that not one of all my varied trials was useless or unneeded.

Not one. Let me repeat it. Let me add my feeble testimony to the great truth of God's wisdom, love and faithfulness in His dealings with those who are of "the little flock," because they have sought through the blood of Christ an adoption into the hea-

venly family. Let me add my solemn conviction that it would *be well* to belong to this family, to these few and scattered numbers, though suffering the loss of all things else ; and let me further declare that to love Christ, to see the King in His beauty, and taste His graciousness, outweighs more of earthly happiness than the imagination of man could ever, in its most exalted flights, conceive.

"You are satisfied now," said poor Bessie, in my next, and last interview with her, "that we do not serve a hard Master. What think you, dear Ruth, of the signs and wonders your eyes have at length beheld?"

"I am bowed down," I replied, "with a sense of my own unworthiness ; and when I seek for words in which to express my gratitude, I find that words have lost their power. I can but look upward and show my heart to God."

"Not only show, but give it too, I hope," replied my dying friend ; "for this, as you well know, has been the object aimed at, in all the varied dispensations of your past life."



“Yes, dear Bessie, I believe I can give and have given it, too; otherwise, with all my rich temporal blessings, I should still be a stranger to that ‘peace which passeth all understanding.’”

Bessie smiled, and pressed my hand, in token of her heartfelt sympathy; and, although this beloved friend “spoke with me on earth no more,” I treasured the holy lessons she had taught me, and the sweet remembrance of our mutual affection, amongst the sacred deposits from which not even death might part me.

Aunt Katherine remained at Ashvale a week; and before her departure, she afforded me one more opportunity of admiring that liberality of mind, and absence of prejudice, for which I had always believed her to be distinguished.

“Your boy,” she said, addressing me when we were alone together, “has been some weeks in my society. You find him a dissenter from many of the principles of the church to which you belong. I wish you to know and

believe that I have had no hand in this ; his judgment was formed before he came under my temporary charge ; and whatever may have been my private feelings on the subject, I have conscientiously refrained from expressing them even to himself. For I repeat what I said to you on a former occasion, that I believe, if a man is fully persuaded in his own mind that what he adheres to is right, he may serve God as faithfully in one really Christian church as in another. You will agree with me, that if he is *not* fully persuaded in his own mind, it becomes his duty to examine into the matter, prayerfully and diligently, and to abide by the result of that examination."

"Dear aunt Katherine," I replied, "I am perfectly satisfied both as to my Willie's principles and as to your conscientious dealings with him. Our blessed Saviour has but one Church ; and so long as we are faithful members of this, it matters little by what name our earthly fold is called."

"Till the day dawn and the shadows flee

away, when the Shepherd will gather all His sheep into the same fold, and watch over them by night and by day for ever."

\* \* \* \*

In due time my Willie became a minister of the gospel; and his name is not undistinguished amongst the faithful followers of the Lamb, who seek to tread in their Master's footsteps, and to extend His kingdom upon earth. My cousin William's daughter is the gentle helpmate he has chosen; and it is my joy and happiness to see these dear ones walking on in the narrow path, and "looking unto Jesus."

May He be their guide, their shield, and their exceeding great reward!

With me, the day of life is waning, the shadows of evening are approaching fast; and as I look back once more, and remember the perils I have escaped, and the storms through which I have been preserved, I am filled with wonder and adoring gratitude towards Him, whose promise to His people—"At evening time it shall be light,"—has been so

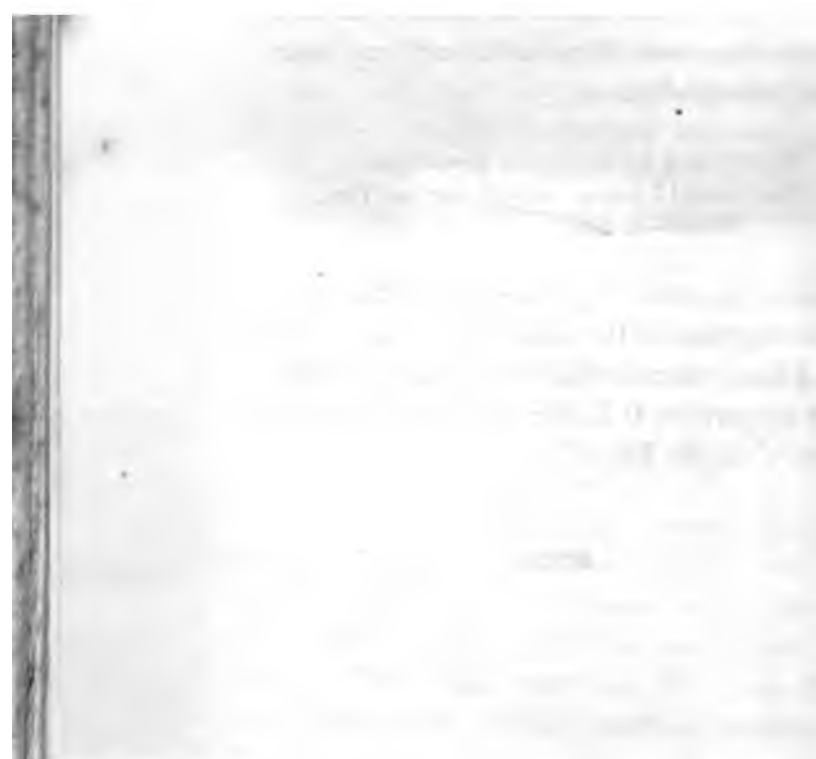
graciously made manifest to my waiting soul.

To the cry of Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation ;" my heart can echo gladly,

"The day's long toil and trouble now are past ;  
Whom should I seek at this still hour but Thee,  
Father—at last."

Happy, thrice happy are they, who, in the morning and in the noon, as well as at the *still hour*, can raise their eyes, and say "*Thou art my portion, O Lord : with my whole heart have I sought Thee !*"

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